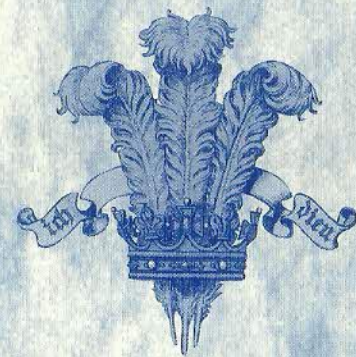


# England Under Edward I

Castles, Conquests, and Community



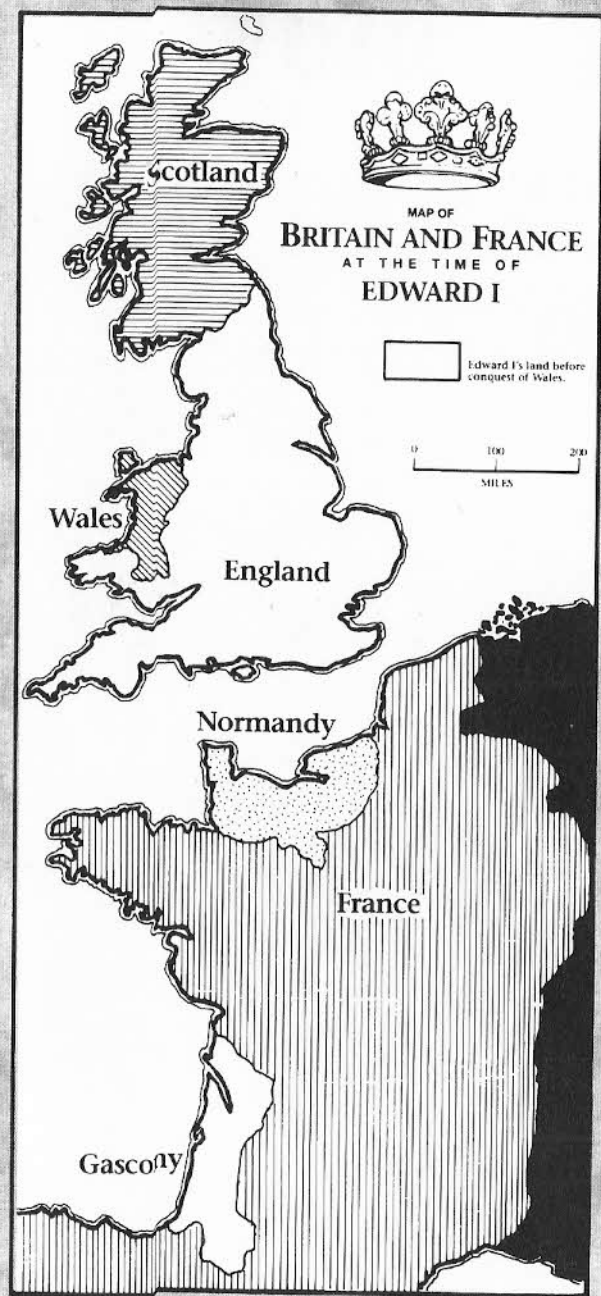
*Jennifer Hawthorne*



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## Castles, Conquest, and Community

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## INTRODUCTION:

### *The Norman Yoke*

Feudalism arrived on the shores of Britain with in 1066 with William, duke of Normandy, and shortly thereafter William's defeat of the recently-crowned Harold II of England at the battle of Hastings ensured that it had come to stay. William, later known as the Conqueror, was a brilliant and determined man who carved a strong and stable kingdom out of a backward wilderness plagued with Viking raids and internal strife. In the process, he earned the long-standing enmity of the Anglo-Saxon native population by subjugating them into near-slavery and by seizing the lands of the English nobles to give to his own Norman supporters.

The basis of the Norman feudal system rested on the maintenance of a static multi-tiered social order in which each level owed duties and service to the level above and, ideally, granted protection and certain services to the level below. At the top of the ladder stood the monarch, who owned all the land and was entitled to a large portion of the proceeds from it. The next step down held the nobles, who were given grants of land to manage by the king and in exchange were required to make themselves and their retainers available for military service at the king's command. At the bottom were the peasants, who did the actual work on the land (though they owned none of it) and provided food and goods for the nobles, receiving their lord's protection in return. The native English referred to feudalism as "The Norman Yoke," in reflection of the fact that the feudal system tended to treat those lowest on the ladder as if they were draft animals rather than men.






Although the Anglo-Saxon natives would probably have disagreed, the adoption of feudalism resulted in several important benefits to England as a whole. The most important was security for its borders against the encroaching Vikings from Norway and Denmark. The knights and men-at-arms provided by feudalism were much more effective than the Saxon housecarls against the fierce Nordic barbarians. (Ironically, the Normans themselves were of Viking stock, the word "Norman" being a corruption of "Northman.") The second important benefit was the establishment of a strong central authority in William the Conqueror, now King William I, who was capable of organizing the land and population into a structure on which to build a true nation that could hold its own against the powerful monarchies of continental Europe.

The Normans lords consolidated their grip on the land by building England's first true castles. Some six hundred years before, the Roman invaders had constructed sturdy stone forts in many places in southern England, but the native population never adopted their building methods and the Romans' knowledge of construction left with them around 400 A.D. The Anglo-Saxon failure to retain this information was at least partly due to the fact that they saw little need for it — the Saxons had strong local communities and little fear of their neighbors, despite the frequent Viking raids in the coastal regions. The Normans, like the Romans before them, came as conquerors, and needed strong permanent structures in which to house themselves and their belongings "against the fickleness of the vast and fierce populace," as one Norman lord put the situation.

These early castles were military forts and little else. They were built entirely of timber, which enabled them to be constructed quickly. Once erected, they sheltered the Norman lord, his family, and his soldiers, and gave him a secure place from which to administer the lands around the castle. With the castle in place, the lord could then begin to organize the peasantry along the lines the feudal system dictated, and the peasantry could do little but comply.



## I. Early Feudal England

The critical flaw in feudalism was that it depended on each member staying in his place. No man could advance to a higher level of the structure by his own efforts, no matter how intelligent, talented, or determined he might be.

Any lowborn with ambition could achieve standing only through joining the Church, where his abilities might gain him advancement with little regard to his birth. This situation no doubt contributed to the strength of the medieval church, enabling it to draw intelligent and energetic men from all walks of life to fill its ranks.

As hard as the feudal system was on the peasants at the bottom of the ladder, the greater threat to the system's stability came from the middle class of nobles. Under feudalism, a baron eager for advancement could no more aspire to a higher class than a serf could achieve baronial standing. Unlike the peasantry, however, the barons had sufficient wealth and power that the temptation to improve their lot in life through force of arms was a constant source of turmoil in England during the Middle Ages. This problem was particularly acute when the monarch was weak-willed or foolhardy.

### The Barons and the Monarchy

The Norman barons first began to be troublesome less than one hundred years after the battle of Hastings, during the reign of Stephen, William the Conqueror's grandson. Stephen's predecessor on the English throne had been his uncle, Henry I, who had died without a male heir and had fought determinedly throughout the last years of his reign to secure the throne for his daughter, Matilda.



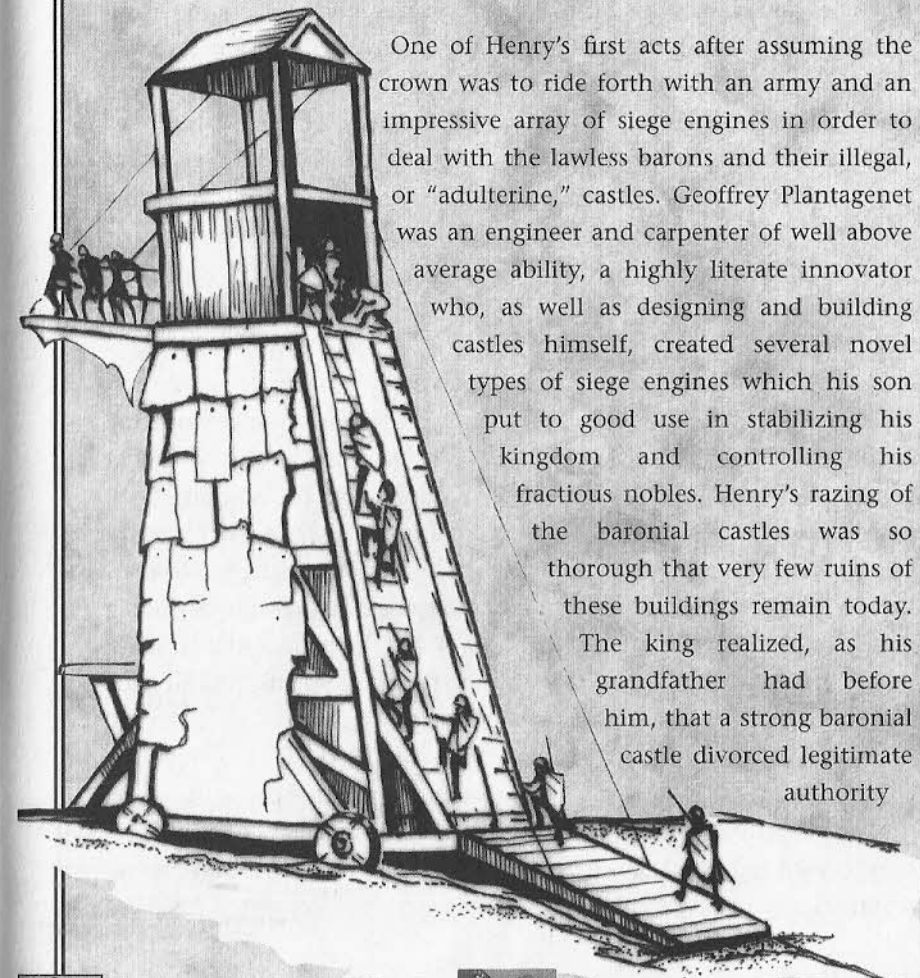
Stephen had sworn fealty to Matilda while Henry lived, but recanted and was crowned on Henry's death. Matilda was a true grandchild of the Conqueror, sharing his determination if not his gender, and promptly set about organizing an alliance to enable her to reclaim the throne. She and Stephen fought almost non-stop for the nineteen years of Stephen's reign, and during that time the barons — with the monarchy preoccupied, powerless and divided against itself — ran wild.

During his reign, Henry I had declared a law stating that no baron was allowed to build a castle or fortify his dwelling without a royal decree, the "license to crenellate." Henry was well aware of the danger of allowing the barons to own castles which the king himself might not be able to conquer, if necessary. The art of castle-building had progressed steadily and rapidly since the days of the Conqueror, as the Norman lords discovered the advantages of stone over timber and as they acquired new knowledge of building techniques by exposure to the cultures of the Islamic peoples they encountered while on Crusade. At the current state of the technology, the advantage was to the defender, and therefore a king had to keep the building of castles under control if he wished to remain secure. This Stephen failed to do.



While Stephen and Matilda quarreled, the barons build thousands of castles of stone and timber, throwing them up at an enormous rate by the simple expedient of drafting all the available peasantry to work on construction, to the point where the all-important fields went untended as the serfs labored to build for the barons. One peasant draftee complained bitterly of the barons' behavior, stating "They cruelly oppose the wretched men of the land with castle-works." While many of these castles were affairs of questionable quality, no few of them were quite sturdy and impressive fortresses of stone. Thus secured behind their stone walls, the barons ignored all decrees of the monarch, made alliances with each other, and conducted numerous private wars, often to the great detriment of the land and the peasantry who lived there. The barons commonly waged economic warfare by the simple method of slaughtering all the serfs on an opposing lord's lands, thus depriving him of the income from his fields while leaving the fields themselves essentially unharmed.

The question of the crown was eventually settled when Stephen's only male heir died, causing Stephen to give up on his dynastic hopes and declare Matilda's son Henry his successor, thereby ending the civil war. Henry was the son of Geoffrey, count of Anjou, called "Plantagenet" for his family's habit of wearing a sprig of greenery tucked into their hats. Henry II founded the Plantagenet line of English kings, also known as the Angevins, after the province where the family began. Henry II's marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine (formerly the wife of France's King Louis VII) gave him control over her vast lands in France to add to his English kingdom, lending his holdings the attributes of a true empire.

One of Henry's first acts after assuming the crown was to ride forth with an army and an impressive array of siege engines in order to deal with the lawless barons and their illegal, or "adulterine," castles. Geoffrey Plantagenet was an engineer and carpenter of well above average ability, a highly literate innovator who, as well as designing and building castles himself, created several novel types of siege engines which his son put to good use in stabilizing his kingdom and controlling his fractious nobles. Henry's razing of the baronial castles was so thorough that very few ruins of these buildings remain today. The king realized, as his grandfather had before him, that a strong baronial castle divorced legitimate authority









from actual power and stripped a monarch of his ability to effectively enforce his decrees. In order to neutralize this ever-present danger, Henry decreed that all castles were henceforth to be considered royal property, and the local lords merely tenants who could be removed at the king's whim. After that, a baron who displeased Henry could find himself turned out of his home at a moment's notice.

Henry did such a thorough job of cowing the barons that they presented relatively little trouble for his sons, Richard and John, when they followed him to the throne. Richard, the Lionheart, spent next to no time in England, preferring to be off fighting wars in foreign countries and leaving his brother, John, to run things at home. When Richard was killed during one of his numerous battles, John assumed the throne, but proved a weak and ineffective king. When Philip II of France seized the lands of Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, Maine, and Touraine from England in 1204, it brought an end to the once-powerful Angevin Empire and earned for King John the ignominious nickname of "Lackland." With the exception of their holdings in the province of Gascony, the powers of England's Plantagenet kings were now entirely removed from the European continent.

The effects of this abrupt reduction of England's power and status in Europe were twofold. Predictably, it instilled a hunger in many of John's successors to reclaim the glory of the Empire, a craving that would eventually lead to the Hundred Years' War. The second effect, however, was more subtle, though its impact on England was nearly as great as that of her lengthy conflict with the French monarchy. Norman lords who had lost their French holdings began at long last to develop a deeper interest in their off-continent lands and the people who lived on them. In a sense, it was at this time that the Normans became true natives of England, and not merely her foreign conquerors.

King John's powers on the domestic front were soon to be similarly reduced. Richard's wars had left John deeply in debt, forcing him to turn more and more to the barons to produce the revenue he required. The reliance of the monarchy on the barons for financial





support, and the concessions the barons won from the king in exchange for their cooperation, convinced the nobility that they deserved more of a say in the running of the kingdom. Though John would escape serious problems from his nobles by essentially giving in to them whenever trouble threatened — going so far as to sign the Magna Carta in 1215 — he left his nine year old son, Henry III, a difficult legacy which would once again plunge England into bitter civil war.

### *The Barons' War*

England was ruled by a regency during the eleven years of Henry III's minority. When the boy king finally took up the reins of power in 1227, his unfortunate first action was to embroil England in a series of costly and unproductive wars in France. Henry was heavily under the influence of Pope Gregory IX, and the barons, already upset by the king's demands for funds for his campaigns, became even more irritated by Henry's subservience to the wishes of the papacy over those of his nobles. Henry's unsuccessful and foolish attempt to seat his son on the throne of Sicily, a position granted him by the Pope, proved the last straw. The barons prevailed upon Henry to sign a series of agreements, the Provisions of Oxford and Westminster, which curtailed the King's power and gave much of it into the hands of the barons instead. A few years later, however, the Pope absolved Henry of his oath to abide by the Provisions, and Henry repudiated them. Exasperated beyond endurance by Henry's display of unconcern for his country and his people, a group of the most powerful barons rose in revolt in 1264 under the leadership of Simon de Montfort, the Earl of Leicester and the husband of the king's sister Eleanor.

Simon de Montfort was a capable and charismatic leader, and an enlightened man for his time, having cultivated friendships with several notable Oxford scholars and accepted their ideas. He had formerly been a friend and confidant of the king, until Henry's actions resulted in an argument and subsequent falling-out between the two. While they were still associates, Henry had built the mighty castle of Kenilworth and given it to his sister and her husband for their own, a







decision that proved to be yet another mistake on Henry's part, as it gave Simon de Montfort a strong and convenient base of operations from which to stage his revolt.

In an attempt to placate Simon de Montfort and the other rebellious barons, Henry agreed to submit their quarrel for arbitration by King Louis IX of France. But Louis' decision, as set forth in the Mise of Amiens, was so much in favor of his fellow sovereign that De Montfort would not accept the terms, and the barons went back to war. In May of 1264, the Earl's forces defeated those of the king at Lewes, and the king and his son Prince Edward became the prisoners of Simon de Montfort, who was now, for all practical purposes, the ruler of England.

Aware that, as an usurper, his rule stood on shaky ground, De Montfort took an unprecedented step in an effort to gain popular support. Although kings before De Montfort's time had summoned members of the nobility for discussions on important issues such as taxes, De Montfort took the idea a step further and summoned not only nobles but important town leaders and burgesses to his governmental seat for council. The councils were given the name of parlement, French for "discussion." Later, the word was changed to Parliament. Although it could not be said that everyone in England had representation in this new government, it was a large step in the right direction.

Simon de Montfort's rule was to be short, however. In May 1265 some of his former supporters among the powerful Welsh border barons (or "Marcher lords", as they were called), changed sides and assisted the twenty-six year old Prince Edward to escape his captivity. The prince promptly rallied the Royalist forces and, in August of the same year, trapped De Montfort and a small fraction of his forces behind the river Severn. The large army on the way to relieve the Earl and his men failed to arrive in time, and De Montfort, his son, and his men were killed at Evesham, restoring the English throne to the Plantagenet line. Though trouble with De Montfort's supporters would continue for a few years, they were ineffective without the Earl's adroit



leadership. The forces stationed at mighty Kenilworth castle, however, would withstand a siege by Edward's forces for over a year, yielding only when food supplies ran short and the prince offered them lenient terms of surrender.

And yet, De Montfort's efforts to reform the English monarchy had not been entirely in vain. For one thing, his defeat of Henry and later defeat by Edward led to the Prince's ascendance over his father. From that point on, Edward was the true ruler of England, though his senile father would live on, king in name only, for another seven years. Edward's capabilities as a ruler far outshone those of his father, both in the military and administrative arenas of medieval government. Edward put down the last of the rebellious forces, made peace with the rest of the barons, and set about drumming his father's government into shape without delay. In addition, Edward was sufficiently impressed with De Montfort's ideas on governing that he adopted a number of them, including the idea of a broader-based parliament.

Within five years after the battle of Evesham, Edward felt his rule in England was stable enough that he took up the cross and went off to Crusade in Europe, the last English monarch to do so. Two years after his departure, Henry III passed on, and the throne became Edward's in name as well as in fact. So confident was Edward that order would be maintained in his absence that he delayed his return to England by many months and spent the time traveling about Europe, making state visits to many of the continental kingdoms before turning toward home. His confidence was well-founded, for he came back to a kingdom as quiet and well-behaved as it had been when he left.





## II. Edward Longshanks

In many ways, Edward I (nicknamed "Longshanks," possibly for his height) was the ideal medieval king. No other English monarch before or after held more power within the borders of his own kingdom.

Although he had shown some evidence of ruthless tyrannical behavior when younger, while on the throne he surrounded himself with capable and sensible ministers and, unlike many another monarch, actually paid heed to their advice. The result was a strong and decisive monarchy, tempered by intelligence and moderation.

Toward the end of his reign, death would rob him of the support of some of his best ministers and also of his intelligent, sensible, loving and beloved wife, Eleanor of Castile. Without their ameliorating influence, many of Edward's worst traits came to the foreground, and he became more intemperate, rash, and vicious to his enemies and his subjects. Nevertheless, for the most part his reign was a model of smooth, just, and effective feudal administration. He established the so-called "Model Parliament" based on the one Simon de Montfort had summoned, and made it an official part of the medieval government. He made many other important legal reforms as well, earning himself the name of the "English Justinian."

On the military front, Edward's accomplishments were equally noteworthy. The loss of most of the English crown's French lands in King John's day had limited Edward's opportunities for expansion there, and the ending of the Crusades eliminated the necessity of sending men and supplies off to distant lands in support of the Cross. Accordingly, Edward's eye fell on the territories of neighboring Wales and Scotland. It became his ambition to

unite all the kingdoms of Britain under one rule — namely, his. During the subjugation of Wales, he created lasting monuments to his reign in the magnificent royal castles he caused to be built in the land he conquered.





### *The First Welsh War*

At the beginning of Edward's reign, the land of Wales on the western edge of Britain was divided into two sections. The south of Wales had been gradually invaded and taken over during the twelfth century by the Norman "Marcher Lords", who carved out sizable holdings for themselves in the Welsh mountains and ruled those areas almost without regard to the king. The north of Wales remained in the hands of the Welsh princes, who were vassals of the English crown in principle but who were in practice as independent as the Marcher lords of the royal will.

The growing strength, unity, and wealth of England under Edward's kingship would likely have doomed Welsh independence before much longer in any case, but the matter was brought to a head earlier than necessary by the actions of the region's ruler, Prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd of Gwynedd. Llywelyn had taken advantage of the chaos during the Barons' War to expand the size of his territory and strengthen his influence in the Wales-England border regions. One of Edward's first acts after his coronation was to request that Llywelyn pay him formal homage as the head of a vassal state, not an unreasonable request on Edward's part. Llywelyn maneuvered to avoid performing this duty, however, perhaps out of a suspicion that Edward was conspiring with Llywelyn's exiled brother David to put David in Llywelyn's place. His excuses and delays continued for four years while Edward's patience grew shorter. The final breach between the two men came when Edward's fleet seized a ship bound for Wales carrying Eleanor de Montfort, daughter of Simon de Montfort and intended wife of Llywelyn. At that point, war was the only possible outcome.

Edward took a bold and forthright approach to settling the problem of his uncooperative vassal. His forces moved into Llywelyn's





stronghold, the province of Gwynedd, by traveling along the north coast of Wales, supported by an army of laborers who cleared roads for the siege engines, and protected by Edward's powerful fleet sailing just offshore. Edward had secured the assistance of the Marcher lords (several of whom had aided him against Simon de Montfort a decade previous) to move their forces in on Gwynedd from the south. Faced with Edward's clear determination to bring North Wales into line, if necessary by deposing Llywelyn and replacing him with his brother, Llywelyn backed down and gave in to Edward's demands with only a token resistance. The Treaty of Conway forced Llywelyn to give up the territorial gains he had made after the Barons' war, swear fealty to Edward as overlord, and pay a large fine (which was later rescinded.) In exchange, he got Edward's forbearance, and the return of Eleanor de Montfort.

This difficulty with Llywelyn convinced Edward that a more permanent solution to the problem of Wales had to be devised. Castle-building became the answer. Each castle would provide a secure permanent garrison for English troops, as well as an administrative center which could be used to control the locals and keep a watchful eye on their activity for new signs of unrest. The castles could also be used as supply depots and arsenals for Edward's army if he should be forced to send in troops again in the future. Edward acquired the services of a master engineer and mason from Savoy, James of St. George, and put him to work designing the fortresses that Edward hoped would keep Wales pacified. The king spared no expense or effort — the royal coffers were opened wide to provide funding for the project, and workers were drafted from all over England and shipped in to provide labor. The castles of Builth, Aberystwyth, Flint, and Rhuddlan were begun during those years, all but Builth located on the north coast of Wales, at the edge of the sea from which they could be supplied and supported by Edward's mighty fleet if attacked.

Plans for some of these castles called for walled towns to be constructed next to the castle proper, towns that would be settled by English colonists. This infusion of non-Welsh blood would strengthen



Edward's ability to rule those territories, and with time and luck, the presence of the castles and towns might have a gentler effect on the natives through increasing the overall level of prosperity and access to goods for the whole area, thus reconciling the Welsh somewhat to their domination by the English and providing a basis for true unity. The process of constructing a castle took many years, however, and before the work could be finished, trouble flared up again.

### *The Second Welsh War*

Edward's intuition that the peace in Wales stood on shaky ground was correct. Although Llywelyn had been cowed, at least temporarily, the Welsh people resented the terms of the treaty forced on them. Keenly aware that Edward's castles, once completed, would drastically hurt their chances of successfully rebelling, they wasted few opportunities to make their dislike of the situation known. A clause in the Treaty of Conway that put certain legal matters in the hands of English judges proved a particular source of dissension. Accusations of judicial bias and corruption ran rampant. In March of 1282, Llywelyn's tempestuous brother David took matters into his own hands when he seized and imprisoned the Justiciar of North Wales in Hawarden Castle, which Edward had given to him for his assistance against his brother in the first conflict. This time, however, David and Llywelyn were united against the English king.

Edward immediately began raising his mercenary army again, although he made one final attempt to avert war by offering Llywelyn an English earldom if he would submit. This time, Llywelyn stood firm against Edward's pressure, and his futile courage cost him his life. He was slain in battle by the forces of the Marcher lords less than a year later. After that, the Welsh lost heart and Edward managed to occupy North Wales with little difficulty. David, the younger brother, remained at large until June of 1283 before being captured by Edward's troops. David's status as a double traitor — first to his brother, and then to the English king himself — brought out Edward's vicious streak; the Welsh princeling was first hung until almost dead, then cut down and disemboweled, and then hacked into pieces and his head displayed on





the Tower of London. In 1284 the Statute of Rhuddlan was declared, in which Wales lost its status as a principality and legally became a part of England.

This second revolt spurred Edward to greater efforts to secure lasting control and peace in Wales, and he ordered work begun on three more castles, even grander and more awe-inspiring than the first set. From this event came three of Edward's greatest works — the castles of Caernarvon, Harlech, and Conway. As with Flint, Rhuddlan, and Aberystwyth, these new castles would be located on the coast of North Wales, overlooking the sea.

Problems would continue in Wales for some years thereafter — most notably the brief uprisings in 1287 and 1294 — but as each of Edward's new castles was completed and occupied, the ability of the Welsh to uproot the invading English grew less. Flint and Rhuddlan were finished in 1286, Harlech in 1287, and Conway in 1288. In addition to building his own royal castles, Edward helped finance the building of so-called "lordship" castles for his earls, including Denbigh, Hawarden, Holt, and Chirk. He remodeled and strengthened older castles at Shrewsbury, Montgomery, and St. Briavels, and also took over and improved upon the captured Welsh castles of Dolwyddelan, Criccieth, and Castell y Bere. The uprising in 1294 resulted in the commissioning of Beaumaris castle, which, along with Caernarvon, Harlech, and Conway, completed Edward's "big four" castles.

Edward's chain of castles enabled him to create a lasting peace in Wales. But the cost of their construction was enormous, both in money and in the amount of labor required. The price of peace in Wales was so high that it arguably cost Edward any chance of securing a similar peace in Scotland by the same methods. In fact, money began to run short even before some of Edward's most ambitious projects in Wales were completed — and as a result, the castles at Caernarvon and Beaumaris were never finished, although both were inhabited and used nevertheless.



## Scotland



Scotland's relationship with England had been an inconsistent one almost from the time Scotland first unified as a nation in the ninth century. Border clashes were frequent, though usually brief, with the kings of Scotland moving into and out of vassalage to England's sovereign seemingly with the tide. The level of Scots autonomy varied according to the relative strengths of the Scottish and English monarchs during any given era, from total independence to uneasy subjugation.

At the time Edward's reign began, Scotland had been effectively independent for about a century, since the time that William the Lion refused to pay homage to Henry II and went unpunished. In 1286, the nation's stability was jeopardized by the accidental death of King Alexander III which left the throne in the possession of his only child, an infant daughter called Margaret, the Maid of Norway. Edward, sensing an opportunity, arranged a marriage between Margaret and his six year old son and heir, Edward. Had things gone according to plan, by virtue of this act Edward II would have been the legal ruler of both England and Scotland when he came of age. Unfortunately, Margaret died somewhat mysteriously during the sea voyage from her home in Norway to Scotland, leaving the throne of Scotland empty.

No fewer than thirteen individuals immediately stepped forward to claim the right to rule. After much argument and investigation, the field was narrowed down to two men, John Balliol and Robert Bruce. To decide the question, the Scots noblemen asked Edward, in his position as nominal overlord of Scotland, to choose between the two claimants. As part of their request, they gave Edward the power to rule in Scotland until the succession dispute was resolved. This took three years, during which time English law prevailed in Scotland. Eventually, Edward decided in favor of John Balliol, and he was accordingly crowned shortly thereafter.

Balliol's rule was troubled from the start. A generous portion of the Scots nobility had found Edward's rule, and his strong law in particular, to be beneficial. When Balliol tried to exert his judicial







authority, he found that some of his nobles took their disputes instead to Edward's court at Westminster, proving that Balliol was unable to assert his sovereignty over his own subjects. In 1293, Edward made a grave diplomatic error by summoning the Scottish king to England in order to answer a complaint brought by one of the Scots nobility. Balliol went, but his pride was lethally injured. When Edward went to war against Philip IV of France in 1294 over Edward's lands in Gascony, Balliol seized the opportunity to make an alliance with the French himself.

Edward, of course, could not tolerate his vassal king making an alliance with an enemy. He called home some of his troops from Gascony, supplemented them with more mercenaries, and then marched on Scotland in exactly the same way he had marched on Wales years before. His armies moved straight up the coast, supported by the English fleet hovering off-shore. Before the year was out, Balliol had been forced to abdicate, and Edward had ridden back home to England in triumph carrying with him the Scots' beloved relic, the Stone of Scone. The Earl of Surrey was left in charge of Scotland so that Edward could turn his full attention to the problem of France. Edward planned a program of castle-building in the Cheviot Hills on the Scottish border, but had neither the funds nor the energy to make a wholesale effort as he did in Wales, and so the endeavor remained a plan only.

Less than a year later, the Scots rose in revolt under the leadership of Sir William Wallace, a brilliant leader but a man of humble birth who had united with Robert Bruce, grandson of the man who lost out to John Balliol in the race for the crown. Wallace and Bruce practiced effective guerrilla warfare against Edward's forces for the better part of a year until Edward returned and once again invaded Scotland. Although force of arms succeeded in restoring order, neither Wallace nor Bruce were captured, guaranteeing that the peace would be short-lived. Two years later Edward was back waging war in Scotland against Wallace, and again the year after that, and again two more years down the road. In 1294 Edward managed to come to a kind of



agreement with most of the Scots nobility, particularly the powerful John Comyn the Red of Badenoch and Robert Bruce, in which the nobles gave homage to Edward and Scotland again came under English law. A new compromise administration was set up wherein a ruling council composed mostly of Scots with a few of Edward's representatives would rule Scotland under an administration largely separate from that of England. This gave the Scots significant self-rule but still kept them within the control of the English crown. At the time, it seemed a compromise that both parties could live with. The capture and execution of William Wallace (killed in much the same manner as David ap Gruffudd, but for far less reason) a year later seemed to auger well for the new order in Scotland.

In 1306 the tenuous peace was shattered when John Comyn and Robert Bruce engaged in a quarrel that ended in Comyn's death. The incident seemed to impel Robert Bruce to return to the extreme position he had abandoned earlier, and he managed to bring together the Scots nobility under his lead in yet another bid for Scots independence. Bruce had an advantage Wallace had been denied — as he was of noble birth, the other nobles supported his leadership in a way they had never done for the commoner Wallace. Prince Edward promptly marched north at the head of his father's army and engaged Bruce's troops, but Bruce escaped, to rise again and resume the fight the following year. This time the king himself marched out to settle with Bruce, but it was one campaign too many for the aging king; he died on the trip just before crossing the Scottish border. The war would continue on for another seven years under Edward II before the young king, less militarily adept than his father, would suffer a decisive and crushing defeat at the Battle of Bannockburn. With that loss went the last hope of bringing Scotland under English rule by force anytime soon.

Edward's failure to subdue Scotland the way he had subdued Wales rose from several sources, not all under his control. Scotland was a much larger country than Wales, and her territory more rugged — it would have taken a proportionately larger number of troops and castles

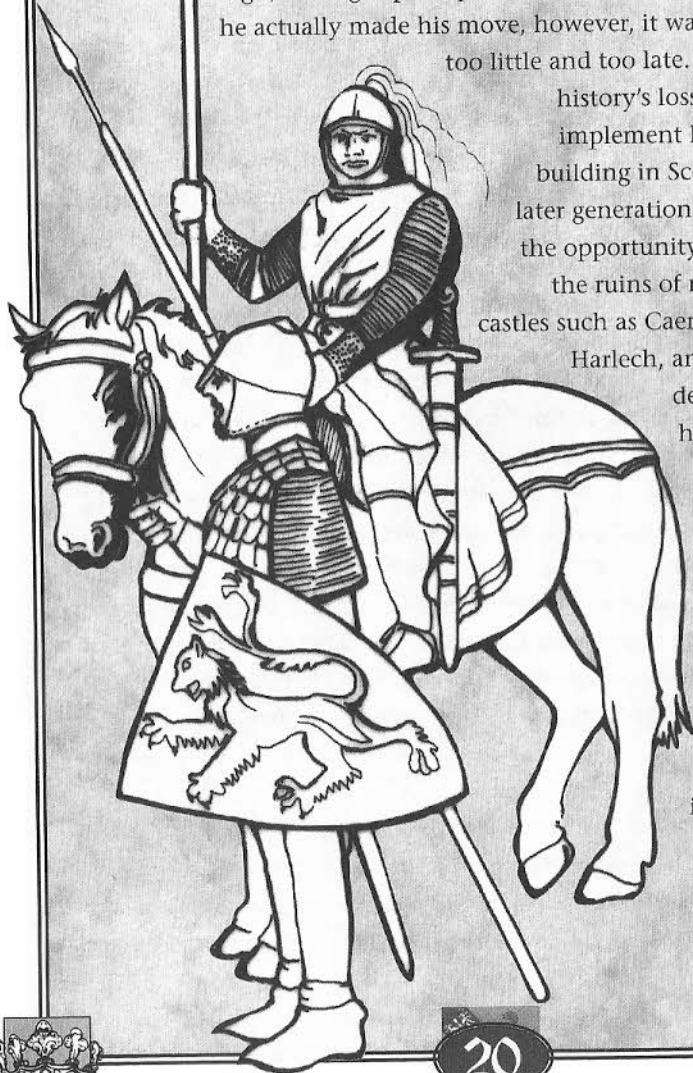


to exert lasting control on the region. Edward was prevented from gathering the needed men and resources by England's strapped financial state, brought on by his profligate spending in Wales and the simultaneous war with France over Gascony. Scotland also possessed more effective leadership in William Wallace and Robert Bruce than Wales did in the unfortunate Llywelyn and his traitorous brother.

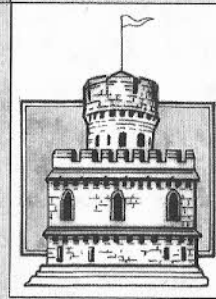
Had Edward gone after Scotland at the start of his reign, he might perhaps have taken and held it. By the time he actually made his move, however, it was a classic case of too little and too late. In a sense, it was

history's loss that he failed to implement his plan of castle-building in Scotland. If he had, later generations might have had the opportunity to walk through the ruins of more magnificent castles such as Caernarvon, Conway, Harlech, and Beaumaris. But despite what might have been, Edward

his legacy is splendid enough for any one monarch, and the remains of his works stand as a lasting reminder of what life was like in England during the middle ages.



### III. Medieval Castles





In the two hundred years between William the Conqueror and Edward I, the art of castle construction came into its own. Structures that began as flimsy wooden huts built to shelter the hardened warriors of the Conqueror's invading army developed into sturdy and defensible

wooden towers, in which a lord might live with reasonable security and minimal comfort, then into timber and stone permanent constructs, and finally into the imposing fortresses well-known from many a historical novel, romance, and fantasy.

The rapid developments in castle design were driven by the demands of the almost constant warfare of the period. The Norman invaders in England, and the English invaders in Wales, both required castles for protection from the resentful natives, while the nobles of Europe needed them for protection against outside aggression. Experience led to many design improvements — for example, when attackers began to use fire as a weapon against the early timber castles, the builders turned to stone instead as a building material. It was harder to work with, and made for much slower construction, but it was stronger than wood, and more importantly, not flammable. Further progress came about through exposure to the advanced construction techniques of the older civilizations in the middle east. The use of vaulting to strengthen ceilings and roofs and the switch from the square keep to the more defensible and economical round keep both came into common use during the time of the Crusades, when nobles were exposed to the work of other cultures and saw the benefits in their designs. It became very common for a lord to take his master mason and castle engineer (usually a smith or a





carpenter) along with him on Crusade in order that they might study the works of the Infidel firsthand and learn from them.

As castle design progressed, the buildings themselves became more comfortable places to live, although they were certainly never pleasant by modern standards. But medieval lords had to exercise caution when making modifications to the castle for comfort's sake; any such change carried with it the danger of undercutting the castle's main purpose, that of defense from attackers. Any change that added convenience for the dwellers in the castle also added convenience for the enemy.

### ***Castle Evolution***

The first type of Norman dwelling large enough and permanent enough to warrant the name "castle" was the timber military fort known as the motte and bailey. The motte was an earthen mound, on which the main tower of the fort was built. The tower, residence of the lord and his family, was a simple affair by later standards, usually a squat two-story wooden building surrounded by a fence of sharpened wooden posts to repel hostile natives. Around the base of the mound the builders dug a deep ditch for further protection. A fenced path lead down to the round, flat bailey enclosure, constructed at the foot of the mound. The bailey, fenced and surrounded by a ditch like the tower, held quarters for the household servants and the soldiers of the garrison plus livestock pens and other necessary buildings, such as the smithy.



The greatest strength of a motte and bailey castle was the swiftness with which it could be constructed. With all of the lord's followers taking a hand, the timber could be cut, shaped, and nailed into place within a single summer. In a newly-conquered land, speed was of the essence if the Normans were to be able to hold what they had taken.

Aside from their ease of construction, the early timber castles had little to recommend them. The wooden fences could be easily breached by farmers with axes or simply burned down. Timber also

tended to rot quickly in the English damp, especially where it contacted the ground. The timber rot (and the threat of catastrophic collapse of the tower that came with it) caused the Norman lords to turn to using stone for the foundations of their towers. Construction with stone had to be limited at first, as it was far more difficult to get and to work with than timber, but as time wore on it gradually replaced more and more of the wood in the tower until the entire main building had changed over to the new building material. As the Normans' control over the natives increased, they became more able to draft the amount of labor necessary to quarry, dress, and move larger amounts of stone to the castle site. Naturally, this forced service did not endear the natives to their new lords, and neither did the practice of appropriating desirable land and tearing down any native houses that happened to already be on it in order to make room for the lord's new dwelling. The locals seized any opportunity to try to sabotage castle construction, much to the annoyance of the lords. Nevertheless, the towers went up.

During the first few Crusades, the Norman engineers discovered the concept of the enclosed, or *enceinte*, castle, with the main tower surrounded by a single or double curtain wall made entirely of stone nine or ten feet thick. Inside the wall, sheltered space was available for all the people, animals, and structures that were formerly kept inside the relatively unprotected bailey. The weakest point of an *enceinte* castle was the hole in the wall through which people and goods traveled, and it therefore became the focus of a great deal of attention by castle designers in the early twelfth century. Many of the standard devices of castle defense were created around this time as a means of protecting the vulnerable entrance. Dry ditches still surrounded most castles (the use of water would not begin for some decades yet), but now they were crossed on a drawbridge, which could be pulled up or removed entirely in case of attack, instead of by a permanent walkway. Sturdy gates made of iron-barred wood were added, as was the portcullis, a lattice of wood framed with iron and shod with iron spikes at its foot. In cases where the lord could afford a double wall, care was taken to make sure the two entrances were not placed in the same line. Attackers who got past the first wall would then have to waste time hunting for the second entrance. Sometimes the







entrance was further protected by a barbican, a small fortified building located on the far end of the drawbridge meant to keep attackers from gaining control of the bridge before it could be withdrawn.

An enceinte castle was a purely passive defense. If the castle was attacked, its only purpose was to hold off the enemy until relief could arrive from elsewhere to chase them off. The inhabitants of the castle could do nothing but sit and try to wait out their attackers. The main tower was always located in the center of the walls, as far away from any threat as possible, and was usually square, this being the easiest shape to build with blocks of stone. At some point, however, an engineer away on Crusade with his lord discovered the advantages of a circular tower: it had no corners for rams or picks to catch on, no “dead ground” at the corners which could not be easily fired into by defenders, and it provided more room inside the tower for the amount of stone used. Soon, every new castle had a round tower. The main tower was referred to as a donjon, the word “keep” not coming into use until the sixteenth century. In time, “donjon” became the word used to describe a particularly secure tower — one often used to hold criminals, giving English the modern word dungeon.

The enceinte castle was the standard for the century before the reign of Edward I. Edward’s castles, however, show a marked change in design intent. Instead of merely sitting and waiting for their attackers to give up or be defeated by an outside force, inhabitants of Edward’s castles would be able to take an active hand in defending themselves and their lands. Historically, the castles of Edward’s day were midway between the Norman military forts and the showy castle-palaces of the later Middle Ages. Edward’s castles showed improvements intended to increase the comfort level of life in his castles, and yet the designs leave no doubt that the first goal of these structures was successful military defense.

### ***Castle Construction in the Era of Edward I***

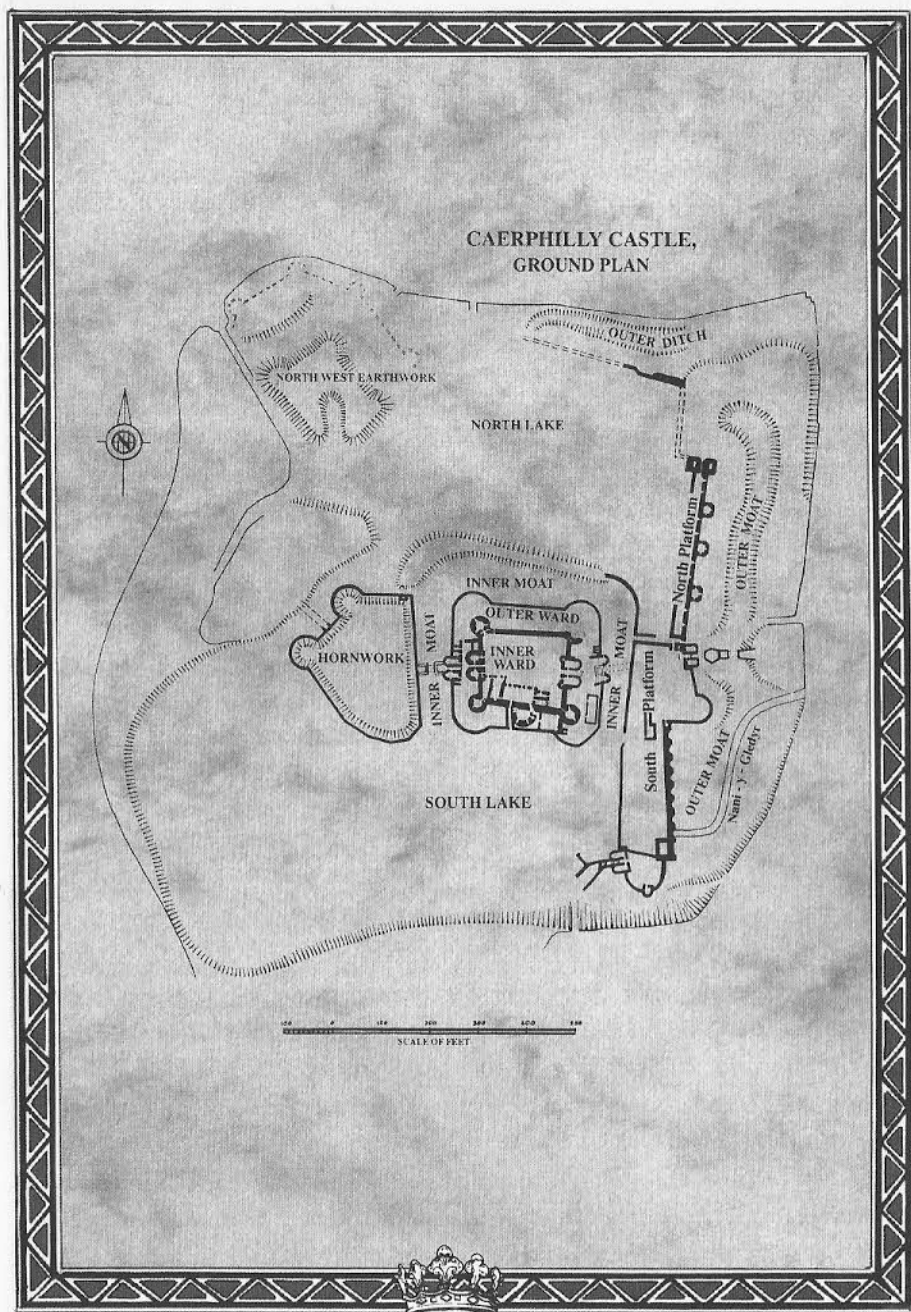
Ironically, the first castle built in the style associated with Edward was not built by the king himself, but by Gilbert de Clare, a powerful Welsh Marcher lord. De Clare’s castle, Caerphilly, incorporated



all of the latest and best design innovations and was remarkably large for the time. Begun in 1268, it took nearly nine years to complete. Edward himself studied the castle and its plans in great detail and consciously imitated it in designing his own works.

The most impressive feature of Caerphilly was its massive and powerful combined keep and gatehouse. The main tower, instead of being located in the center of the walls, was moved up to become a part of the wall itself, enabling the denizens of the tower to take an active part in the castle’s defense and providing extra room for the defensive machinery of the gatehouse. The main tower was too tall to be scaled by mobile assault towers, and the walls were thick enough to withstand a great number of hits from the standard torsion catapults of the day. Before reaching the keep, however, attackers first had to contend with the castle’s other great defense — its huge, water-filled moat. De Clare’s castle-builders had engaged in a remarkable feat of medieval engineering, digging a deep ditch around the castle, reinforcing it, and then damming and diverting a local river to fill it, creating a small artificial lake. Edward also admired another aspect of the castle’s design — the pleasing symmetry of its floor plan, a symmetry he copied in several of his own castles such as Caernarvon and, especially, Beaumaris. Caerphilly’s main attributes would thus become the standards for Edward’s Welsh castles, although not every feature would be found on every one: the powerful and heavily defended gatehouse tower, the extensive water defenses, the ambitious size, the multiple concentric outer walls, and, usually, the symmetry of design.

The building of one of Edward’s castles took thousands of people. At the top of the work order would be the master engineer (in Edward’s case, always the brilliant Master James of St. George.) Under him worked dozens of master craftsmen: quarriers, masons, mortarers, carpenters, blacksmiths, plumbers, and diggers, each of whom commanded a crew of more junior craftsmen. The most numerous workers, and those given the lowest regard (and pay) were the common laborers who hauled stone and timber and provided food for the rest of the workers. These lowest workers were mostly farmers drafted for labor on the king’s castles during the summer, when their fields required the



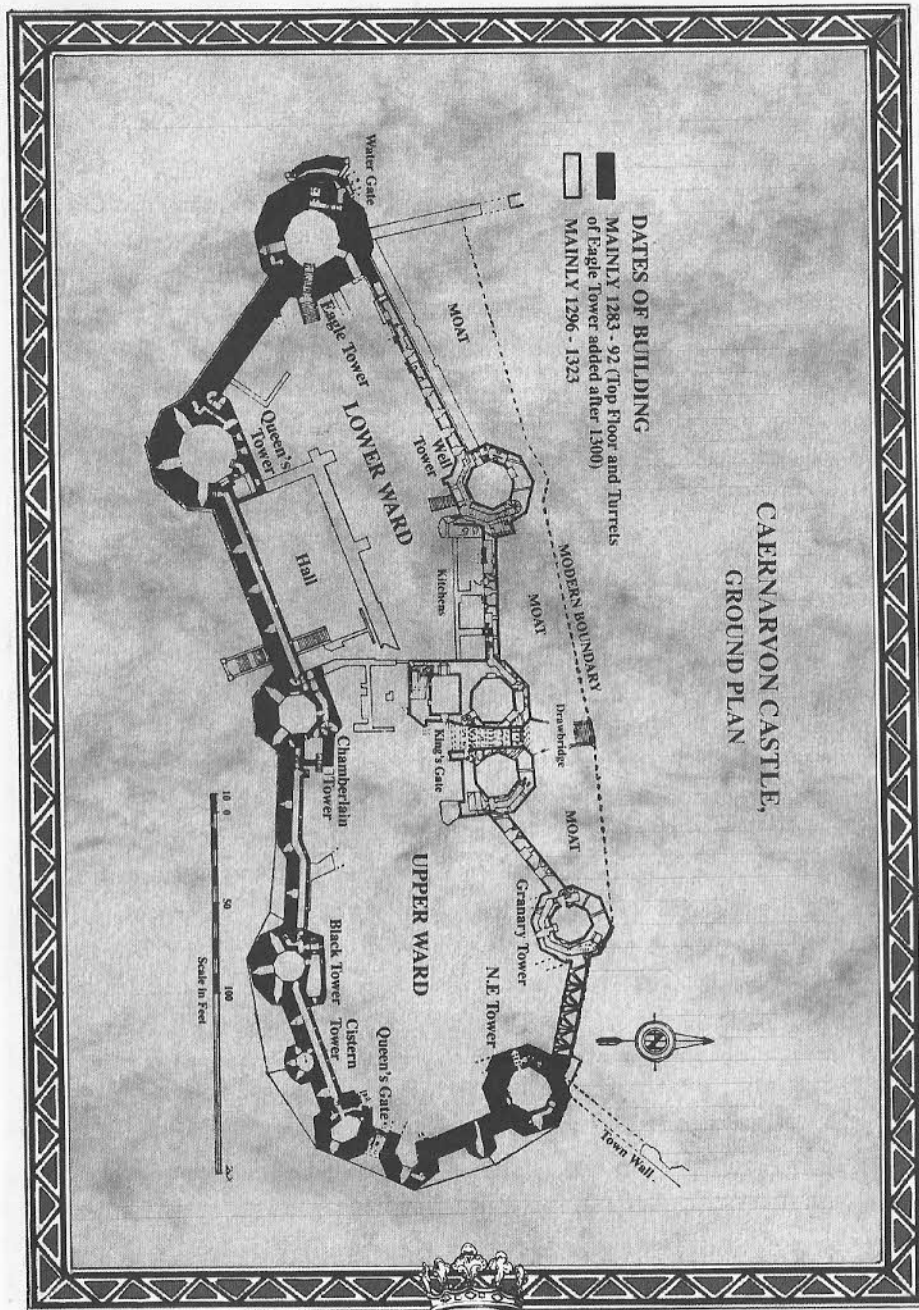
least amount of constant attention. Although service was involuntary, all labor was paid for (at least as long as the king's coffers held out.) The large amount of money required for the effort was gathered through taxes, land rents, sales of livestock and produce, and the personal savings of the king.

To build a strong and defensible castle, the master engineer first had to choose a good location. An engineer looked for a number of things in a castle site, and tried to get as many of them as he possibly could in one place. A flat expanse of rock made an excellent base for a castle, as it provided support for heavy stone walls and prevented attackers from digging underneath them to gain entry. Geographically, the castle was most useful when placed near a town center (to keep watch and control over the local population) or near a militarily strategic point such as a high hill or a river ford. Another good choice might be to build on the site of an older Norman or even Roman fort — these were often already placed at strategic locations, had the land pre-leveled, and might even have intact and usable foundations to build on. If the site itself wasn't usable (perhaps because of the earthen mound, which usually wasn't sturdy enough to support the weight of thick stone walls), it often proved a valuable source for good stone, sometimes already cut and dressed. Building a castle by the sea was also desirable when possible, as the ocean provided an excellent natural barrier to invasion from one direction and, if the residents of the castle had allies with ships, the castle could be resupplied indefinitely in the case of a siege. Nearly all of Edward's castles were built by the sea for just this reason, to enable him to use his powerful fleet to best advantage for support and supply in case of an attack.

The process of constructing the castle would take at least four or five years and often much longer. Two of Edward's most ambitious castles, Caernarvon and Beaumaris, were worked on for over forty years and never completely finished, although they were inhabited and used despite that. Work could not be done in the winter as the cold weather would cause the mortar to crack and weaken the walls. Common laborers were hard to come by during the spring and fall, when they

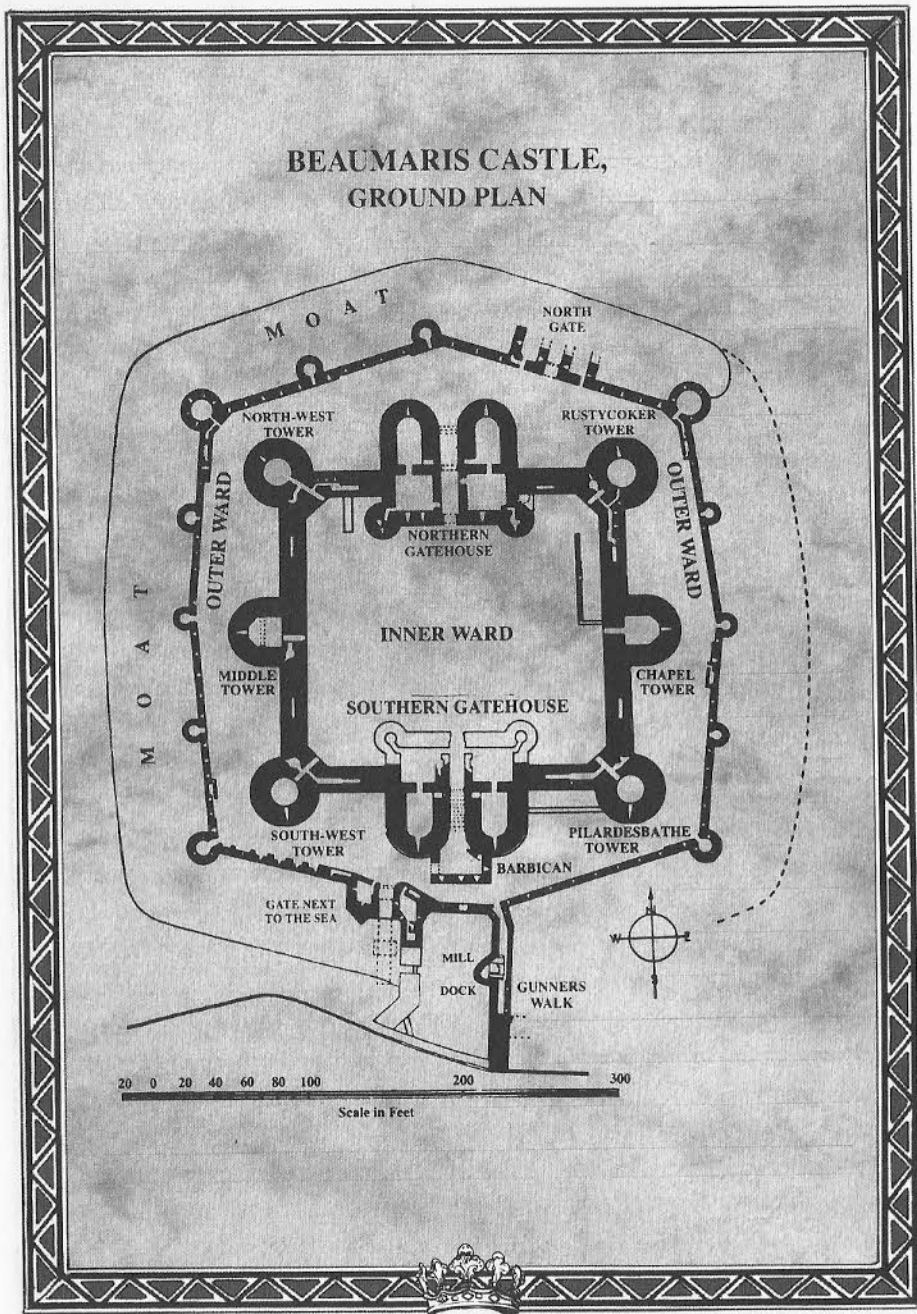






were needed on their farms to sow and harvest their crops. Although the barons during the anarchy of Stephen's reign did not concern themselves over disrupting the work of the farmers, Edward was a wiser ruler and moderated his demands to a more reasonable level. This meant that most of the work on the castle had to take place during a few months each year. The most common building material was sandstone, quarried locally, cut into square blocks, dressed by smoothing the four outer edges (leaving the inner and outer faces rough), and then hauled to the building site by cart. The blocks were joined with mortar made of lime, sand, and water. The tower would be roofed with slate, or, if the builder were rich enough, lead.

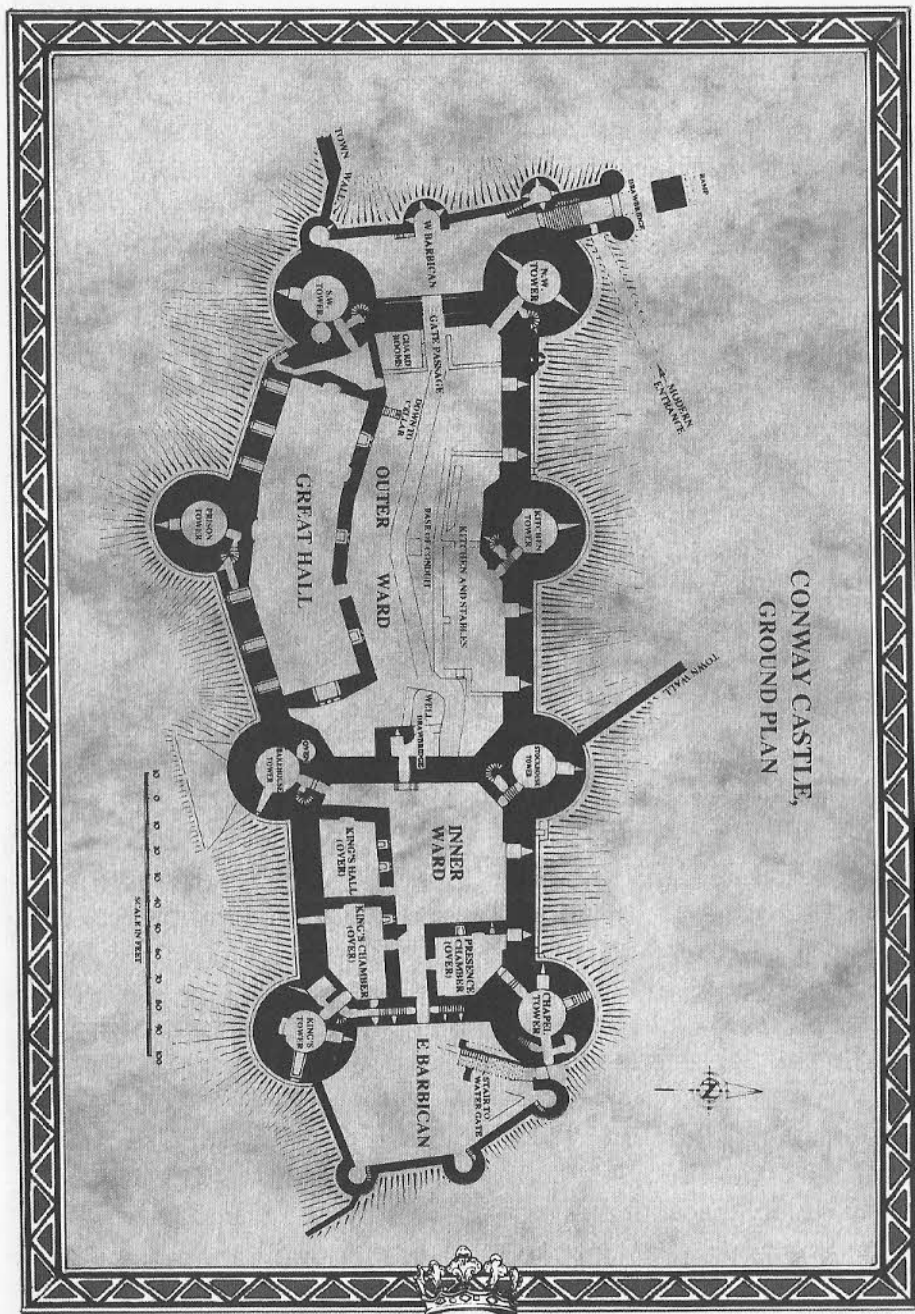
The craftsmen would first construct wooden temporary buildings on the castle site, to house the workers while the building progressed. Next, they would begin work on the outermost wall, starting with the towers which would join and strengthen the individual wall sections. If the castle was to have a town attached to it, as at Rhuddlan, the towers for the town walls would be begun at the same time. Each of these towers stood about ten feet higher than the wall itself, which might be up to forty feet in height. The three rooms inside the tower, used for storage and as a place for guardsmen to sleep and eat, could only be entered through two doors. The first one was placed at ground level inside the wall, and the second at the top of the tower to give access to the walkway running along the top of the wall around the castle's perimeter. The towers were shaped like horseshoes, round in front to give no purchase to picks or rams, and square in back for ease of construction. At top level, the back of the tower might be deliberately left open to leave a gap in the walkway which was usually bridged by a wooden plank. If attackers gained the top of the wall, the boards would be taken down, isolating that part of the wall and keeping the invaders from moving from tower to tower along the wall-walk. The outer gatehouse would be built at the same time as the towers, its design basically that of two larger than normal horseshoe towers built close together with a narrow passage between. A structure would be constructed between the two towers, above the passage, to house the gate and portcullis.



Once the towers were complete, the walls themselves would be built. Each wall began as a hollow shell with inner and outer faces made of cut and dressed blocks of stone fitted snugly together. When the shell was complete, the several feet of empty space between them would be filled with broken chunks of rock, pebbles, and rubble, and then a large amount of lime poured in to turn the rubble into a single solid mass. Walls constructed this way were remarkably strong and difficult to batter down. The completion of the towers and outer wall was an important prerequisite for the construction of the rest of the castle, as it helped to keep the unruly natives away from the workers and prevented them from sabotaging the effort. The Welsh understood, like the English had before them, that the construction of a castle represented a long-term loss of their hope for independence, and they could therefore be counted on to cause problems with the project when given half a chance.

When the outer wall was finished, the workers next built the inner wall, making it five or ten feet higher than the first wall so that archers could fire from both walls at the same time if necessary. As with the outer wall, the towers and the gatehouse were built first and the walls used to join them afterward. The inner gatehouse was a massive reinforced double tower, similar in design to the outer gatehouse but much larger and more impressively defended. In addition to being the main point of the castle's defense, the inner gatehouse towers also held most of the important rooms of the castle, including the living quarters for the lord and his family. The inner gatehouse would enclose several iron-bound doors that travelers would have to pass through to gain entry, plus at least two portcullises (one at either end of the passage), and would have a deep pit just inside the first door. Normally, the end of the drawbridge would cover this pit, but with the drawbridge pulled up, the drop was revealed, presenting yet another challenge to any would-be castle stormers. The roof over the passageway sported numerous "murder holes" through which the tower's residents could poke spears, shoot arrows, or drop any number of interesting and dangerous things onto invaders trying to work their way through the multiple gatehouse barriers. The last link in the castle's defense would





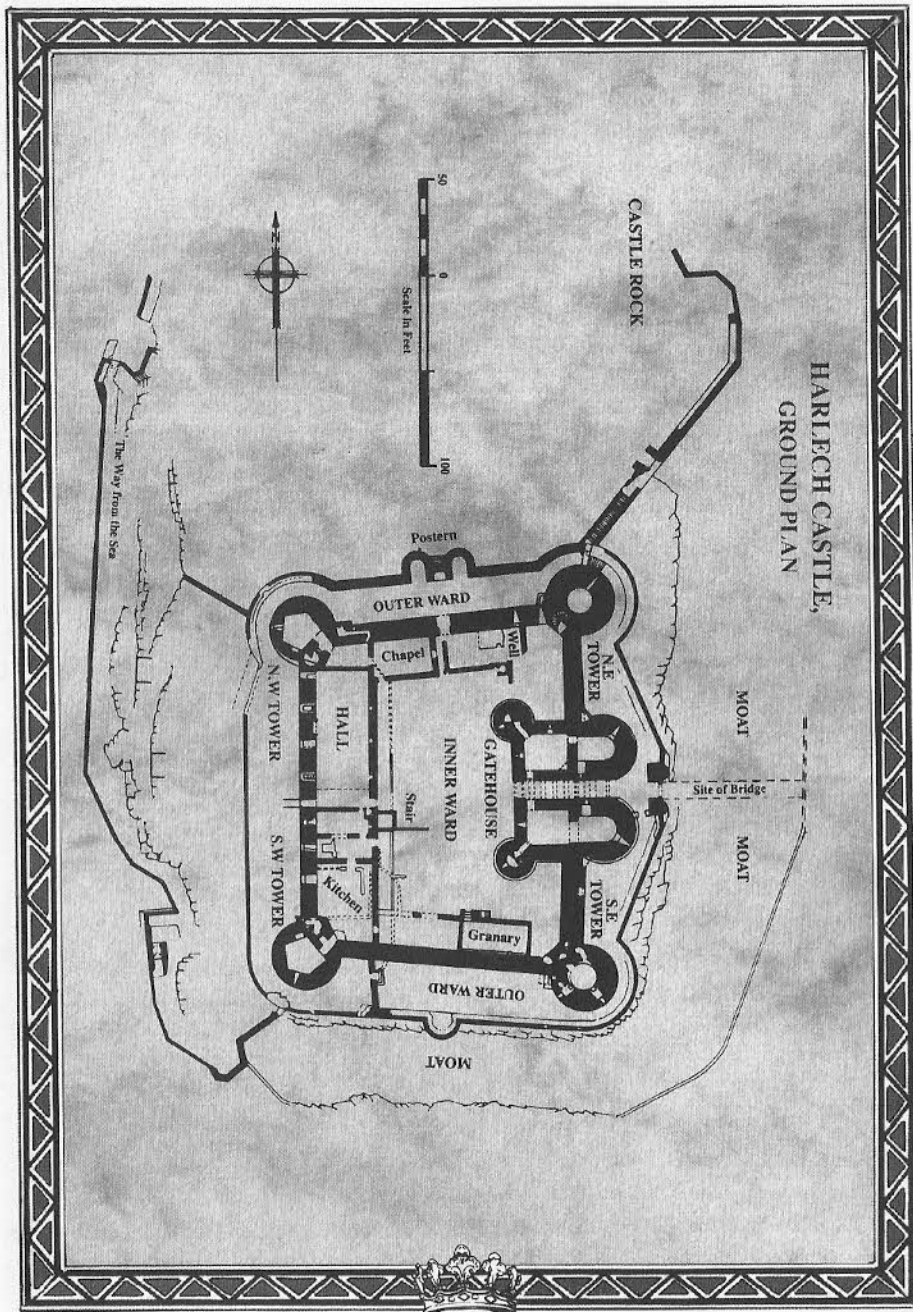
be created by digging a ditch around the castle, up to thirty feet deep, and then, if possible, damming or diverting a local source of water to fill it in, creating a moat.

The castle could be inhabited any time after the inner wall and gatehouse tower were finished, but the lord and his family more often preferred to wait until more amenities had been added. These would usually include a covered great hall for feasting, built into the side of the inner wall to save on stone, and a chapel of some sort. The rest of the buildings in the inner courtyard of the castle — stables, kennels, servants' quarters, smithy, and so on — would be made of timber and would go up quickly. A coat of lime whitewash was often added to the outside of the castle, giving it the appearance of a solid mass of stone and adding to its ability to inspire awe in the peasantry. The courtyard and grounds outside the castle might be landscaped to create a flower garden for the lady of the castle, a small park for strolling, and a jousting yard for the lord's knights. At that point, the lord, his family, and his retinue would move in and take command of the castle and its environs. If the castle had a town attached, English settlers would arrive with the lord and begin setting up homes and shops within the town walls.

### *Inside a Castle*

While a walk through the ruins of one of Edward's fortresses today might give the impression that a medieval castle was a drab and gloomy place to live, this would not be entirely true. While a castle certainly wasn't comfortable by modern standards, it did represent the best that was available at the time. Medieval man had the same appreciation for bright colors and cheerful surroundings that people do today, and took considerable pains to improve the livability of his dwellings.

The interior walls of the castle were only rarely left as bare stone. They were often whitewashed or covered with gypsum plaster, sometimes with a type of wood paneling or wainscoting. Red, blue, and green wall paints might have been used as well, though they were no



doubt rare and expensive. Artistic painting on the walls was more common, murals being quite popular. Colorful tapestries and banners could be found in many places, having the double effect of adding brightness to the room and helping to cut down on the ever-present drafts. And when the season was right, every hall and room would have one or several bouquets or wreaths of fresh flowers, collected wild in the fields or perhaps cultivated in the Lady's rose garden. Like the banners, the flowers did double duty, adding cheer and at the same time helping to mask the smells that went with primitive sanitation methods.

Such sanitation as was available was provided by the garderobe, or, in its absence, by the chamberpot. Garderobes were stone shafts built directly into the walls of the castle that lead either outside, sometimes into the moat, or into a cesspit in the foundations of the castle. A wooden seat would be placed on top of the shaft, with a convenient hole in the middle. The garderobe shaft might extend up to the roof to allow rainwater to enter in order to aid cleanliness, but if the rains were insufficient and the smell got too bad, some unfortunate lower servant would be drafted to clean out the shaft by hand. The garderobe would be fitted with a door for privacy and to help contain the smell, and considerable thought had to be given during castle design to locating the garderobes in places where the stench would be least objectionable. The lord's private chambers and those for important guests would have their own private garderobe closets, while the rest of the castle would use a set of public facilities. Chambers without easy access to the garderobe would have a chamberpot instead, but the garderobe was preferred.

Each castle had a dungeon, sometimes several, located in the lowest level of the castle or sometimes in the base or top of a tower, but most of the time they were used for storing firewood and food against a possible siege instead of for imprisoning miscreants. Water for the castle residents was provided by a large well sunk into the center of the castle, sometimes located in the basement instead of in the courtyard. The well was a key strategic point during a siege, as without a supply of fresh water the castle could not hold out more than a few days. The kitchens



in the castle were always a potential fire hazard, and before Edward's time were usually housed in a separate building a good distance from the castle. By the time of the conquest of Wales, however, engineers had learned how to make effective chimneys, and the kitchens were incorporated into the main castle structure. The kitchens were one of the few rooms in the castle (along with the lord's quarters) which might occasionally have something like running water, provided by means of a roof cistern to catch rain water and a pipe to run it down through the wall to a basin in the appropriate room.

Window glass was still uncommon in Edward's time, his father having been the first monarch to ever use glass windows in a castle. The more usual coverings were greased horn or thin cloth, combined with shutters. In summer the windows were simply left open. The first glass windows were mounted in wooden frames and were mobile, allowing the king or important noble to take his windows with him as he moved from castle to castle, checking his lands.




The furnishings of the household tended to be light, even for the king, since they might have to be packed up several times a year and carted to a new castle. There would be a bed for the lord and his wife; a number of trestle-tables; quite a few sturdy wooden chests for storing clothes, linens, and valuables; and possibly a chair or two. Only the lord got to sleep in a bed, as a rule — the rest of the household slept in bunks, or on thin pallets, or sometimes just on dirty straw on the floor. The only other furniture of importance was the altar for the family chapel, a flat slab of fine stone in a rich wooden frame, often inlaid with precious metal and jewels or elaborately engraved. The usual floor-coverings were straw or rushes, mixed with sweet herbs to help hide bad odors from rotting food scraps and dog droppings, which could be easily swept out and replaced when they became too rank. Carpets were known, but because they could not be refreshed this way they were considered rather repellent, and Edward's wife Eleanor caused something of a court scandal when she insisted on having her rooms carpeted with rugs brought from her native Castile. Castle lighting was provided mainly by oil lamps or rushlights made by dipping bulrushes in tallow; candles were an expensive luxury and used sparingly.



#### IV. Medieval Warfare

The presence of a castle on settled lands presented a major problem for any would-be invader. Any attacker could take the lands outside the castle walls with relative ease, but it was a temporary victory at best. As long as the castle stood, the lord and his soldiers could sally forth at their convenience to engage the invaders. If the attacking army moved on without first defeating the castle, it would have to give up control of the lands it had taken and leave a large enemy force at its back. Yet, at the same time, if the invaders chose to stay and hold the lands, they would be caught in a waiting game, one that an unsheltered army in hostile territory with limited supplies had little hope of winning against another army secure behind stone walls and with enough food and supplies stockpiled to last months.

The only way to truly take the land was to somehow defeat the lord and his forces, which meant defeating the castle by laying siege to it. This involved surrounding it with armed men, and then either breaking down the walls, or simply waiting until the people in the castle surrendered out of fear of starvation or for some other reason. It was not an endeavor to be undertaken lightly. Even the most expertly run siege was a lengthy process that could last weeks, or more usually months, or as long as an entire year in a few cases. An army that remained in one place for that length of time made itself an easy target to find; if the castle's lord had allies, the invaders were likely to end up under attack themselves, without a castle for protection. And even if the castle's defenders did not have friends to come to their rescue, there were numerous other problems that could force the attackers to abandon the siege. They might run out of food and water, the unsanitary conditions of the temporary camps could lead to disease among the soldiers, or they might give up out of simple boredom.



Faced with the hardships that a siege forced on both attackers and defenders, medieval lords sought out other means to end the conflict whenever possible. The most common method was for the leaders of the two groups to come to an agreement that if the castle was not relieved by an outside force within a certain period of time, the defenders would peaceably surrender, saving everyone a great deal of trouble. This arrangement was considered the sensible thing to do and the castle's lord could agree to it without any loss of honor. There were many circumstances, however, in which such a gentlemanly compromise was not practical — if the castle's lord had reason to believe that surrendering would lead to his death, for example, because he had committed treason, or because the attacking lord was not considered honorable and trustworthy. If the two parties could not reach terms, the siege would have to continue until the castle was subdued or the besiegers somehow driven off.

### Laying Siege

A castle siege began when the invading army moved onto the land around the castle and surrounded it, isolating the building and its residents from the rest of the country. It was important for the success of the attack that a tight blockade be kept up around the castle, in order to prevent the castle being resupplied and to keep information from passing either in to the defenders or out to any possible allies of the castle's lord. The first activity of the soldiers would be to construct a palisade of inward-slanting sharpened poles all around the castle to keep anyone from leaving. Next, they would assemble a simple wooded fort to house their own lord, a fort which was often similar in design to the old motte and bailey castles of two hundred years before. Once these structures were in place, the army could get on with the job of dealing with the castle itself.

The primary goal of the attacker during a siege was to somehow get his men inside the castle. There were only three basic methods he could use to accomplish this: he could attempt to storm the castle by force; he could try to take it by subterfuge; or he could win through sheer stubbornness by sitting and starving the castle-dwellers into submission. This last option was surest, in the long run, but

generally the least desirable — in addition to the usual problems with supply, disease, boredom, and the potential for a counterattack, this method was distinctly lacking in elegance. A monarch trying to subdue a rebellious baron could lose much valuable face and prestige if the baron managed to keep him at bay for months on end, even if the king eventually came out the victor.

Taking the castle through subterfuge was the best but most difficult method. If done successfully, the attackers would gain their victory at next to no cost to themselves, and with little or no damage to the castle which could then be put to use by the victors. A saboteur might poison the castle's well, set fires among the stores, or simply open up a gate to let the attacking army in during the night. The difficulty lay in getting an agent inside the castle in the first place. A particularly clever and farsighted lord might already have a paid agent inside the enemy's castle, but usually the attacker had to either find a way to get one of his people inside, or else to sway the loyalty of someone already within the building. Putting a man inside meant somehow getting him over the wall without alerting the guards, as the gates of the castle were not opened for any reason during a siege. During the siege of Château Gaillard in France, one dauntless soldier of the attacking force gained access to the castle by crawling up a garderobe shaft during the night (surely an act of supreme loyalty). Buying off one of the locals, as an alternative, might be easy enough with the promise of gold, but the attacking lord had no good way of making the offer known to those inside the castle, aside from shouting it out to the walls for everyone to hear. If the attacker were very lucky, some disgruntled or opportunistic local might decide to betray the castle on his own initiative, either for revenge on his own lord or in the hope of being given a reward after the fact by the attacker.

Most lords lacked good opportunities for subterfuge, and so resorted to the most common method of defeating a castle — the use of force. The main object of attack was the castle wall itself, as the gatehouses were always heavily defended. The wall could be defeated by going over it, going under it, or going through it, and in general all these methods were tried during the siege, sometimes in unison.



Going over the wall was the simplest and fastest method for gaining entry, but it was nearly always doomed to failure unless the attackers had some measure of surprise and a major advantage of numbers over the defenders, and even then it was risky. A concerted rush up the wall using long ladders with hooked ends might be tried, but it was a simple matter for the defenders to push the ladders off the walls, and the attackers were defenseless while climbing, easy targets for archers. A somewhat more effective method involved the use of a mobile tower, a tall enclosed wooden box with a door at the top and one at the bottom and a ladder running up the center. The tower would be pushed up next to the wall, then a plank thrown across from the tower's upper door to the wall so that the soldiers could cross. The tower protected the soldiers while climbing, but otherwise it had the same basic problem as the ladder — it was difficult to get enough men over to the wall fast enough to overwhelm the defenders.

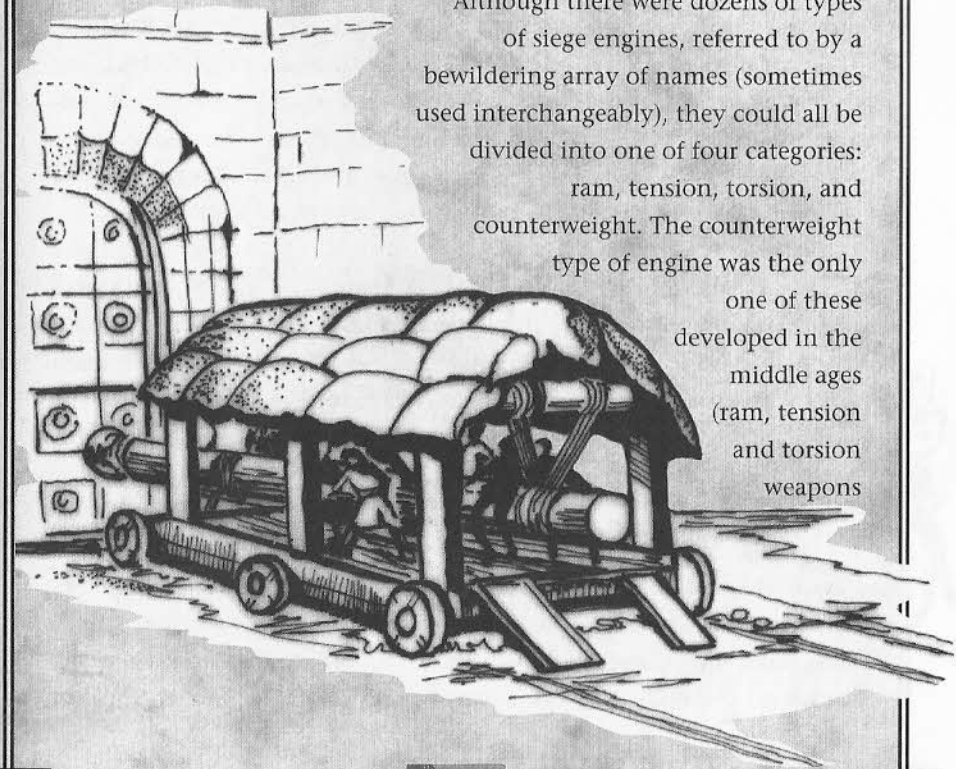
Digging under the wall was often a very useful and effective tactic. A tunnel produced this way could be used for two different purposes — either as an entry point into the castle for the attacker's soldiers, or as the first step toward bringing the wall down by a method called sapping or mining, developed in the twelfth century by mercenary soldiers who specialized in besieging castles. When mining, the soldiers would go under the wall but not all the way into the castle; after digging a few feet under the far side of the wall, they would leave the tunnel and then fill it with timber and brush soaked in animal fat and oil. When the kindling was ignited with a torch, the wooden tunnel supports would catch fire and burn, causing the tunnel to collapse and bringing a section of the wall down with it. When done properly this was a very effective method of breaching the castle wall, but it was not without its limitations. The biggest problem with tunneling was that it was useless against a castle built on a solid rock foundation, or surrounded by a large moat, which helps to explain the popularity of those features in medieval castles. A tunnel used for mining also had to be properly designed in order to work right — a badly made tunnel might collapse on the diggers before it reached far enough under the wall to be effective, or might reach under the wall

but not be large enough to weaken it to the point of collapse. And if the castle residents detected a tunnel being dug (not easy, if the starting point of the tunnel were concealed in a hut) they were perfectly capable of digging a counter-mine and breaking through to kill the tunnelers.

### Siege Engines

If the design of the castle ruled out the possibility of tunneling, and the attackers did not have enough of an advantage to risk going up the wall, the last option was to go through it. This was no easy task, given the strength and thickness of the typical castle curtain wall, and a large number of specialized techniques had to be developed for the job. To go over or under the wall, attackers needed only relatively simple tools — ladders, towers, shovels, and picks — but to break through nine feet of solid rock and mortar required the use of the massive and complex weapons of war collectively called siege engines.

Although there were dozens of types of siege engines, referred to by a bewildering array of names (sometimes used interchangeably), they could all be divided into one of four categories: ram, tension, torsion, and counterweight. The counterweight type of engine was the only one of these developed in the middle ages (ram, tension and torsion weapons



having been known and used by the ancients). Several of these weapons were little more than scaled-up versions of the common hand weapons of the day.

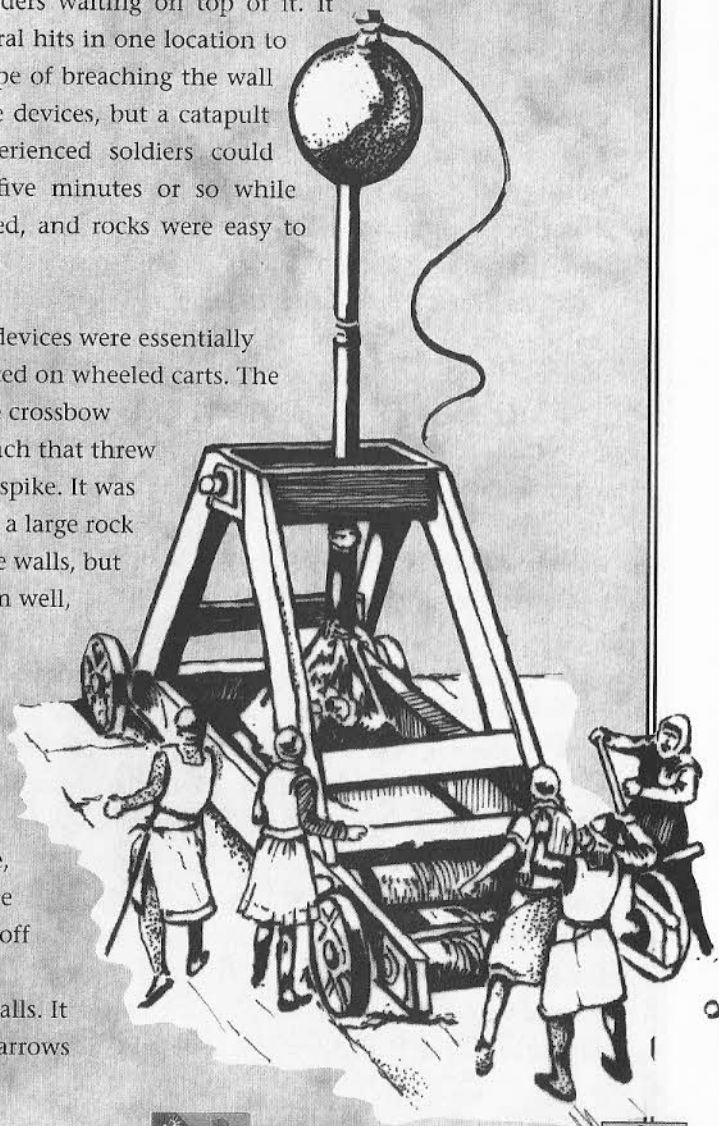
The earliest type of wall-breaching device was, of course, the battering ram. At its most basic, this was a long wooden pole held by the attackers which was repeatedly pounded against a castle wall or door to try to knock it down. This primitive kind of ram proved useless against modern castle walls, however, leading to additions and improvements. First, the pole's striking point was sheathed in iron (sometimes shaped like a ram's head) for extra toughness, and later it became pointed as well, for extra penetrating power. To protect the men carrying the ram, designers then added a mobile hutch which could be moved in place next to the wall, keeping off the arrows and rocks of the defenders; for a large ram, this shelter might hold up to a hundred men at once. From there, the next step was to mount the ram itself inside a permanent hutch, hanging it from the roof so that the weight of the ram was taken by the ropes instead of by the men carrying the pole. The roof of the hutch would be covered with moist earth to keep the defenders from setting it alight with flaming arrows. This innovation had two advantages: it required fewer men to get the same effect, and it became easier to ensure that the ram struck the same spot on the wall each time it was swung.

Of the four basic types of siege engine, the ram was the only one that did not operate by throwing ammunition through the air, and that was powered solely by human muscle. Each of the other three types harnessed another source of energy: torsion devices employed twisted ropes, tension devices used stretched ropes, and counterweight engines took advantage of gravity for throwing power.



The most common siege engine was the catapult, a torsion device which came in over a dozen slightly different varieties. The basic structure of a catapult consisted of a wheeled cart carrying a large winch-like device, attached to which was a long wooden arm with a big bucket on the end. Heavy rope was wound tightly around the arm of

the winch to provide pulling power from the resistance of the twisted rope. The attackers rolled the cart up to the wall of the castle, loaded a large rock (usually between ten and fifty pounds) into the bucket on the end of the arm, winched the arm back, and then released it. The arm would spring forward and strike a stopper bar above the winch, sending the rock flying at or over the castle wall. With luck, the rock would knock a hole in the wall, or at least smash a few of the defenders waiting on top of it. It usually took several hits in one location to have any real hope of breaching the wall with one of these devices, but a catapult manned by experienced soldiers could fire once every five minutes or so while ammunition lasted, and rocks were easy to come by.

Tension devices were essentially large bows mounted on wheeled carts. The balista was a huge crossbow cocked with a winch that threw a long and heavy spike. It was less effective than a large rock at damaging castle walls, but it was easier to aim well, and woe to the defender who took a direct hit. The ingenious springal was another tension-based siege engine, although one more useful for picking off defenders than flattening castle walls. It featured a rack of arrows









held at an angle, pointing up toward the castle, resting on a flat flexible board or thick reed mat. When the board or mat was winched back and then released, the springal fired an impressive barrage of missiles all at once.

The last and most damaging type of siege engine was the counterweight device, of which the trebuchet was the crowning glory. Its basis was a wheeled cart on which was mounted something very like a huge see-saw, with a long pole—the throwing arm—suspended on a fulcrum. On one end of the throwing arm was mounted a very heavy permanent weight; the other end would be winched down to ground level and loaded with ammunition, usually a rock weighing up to five hundred pounds. After the trebuchet was aimed, the loaded arm would be cut free and the heavier weight on the other end would snap down, throwing the ammunition into the air with great force. A trebuchet was a serious threat to a castle if there were enough good-sized rocks available to keep it supplied with ammunition, as it could handle missiles ten times the size of those an ordinary catapult could hurl. It could also be consistently aimed with greater precision than a standard catapult, as the ropes which powered the smaller device often stretched, reducing their accuracy. Furthermore, a trebuchet could be operated in the rain, where a rope-powered machine was rendered useless because water would make the ropes slacken until they no longer held enough tension to function.

The lords usually instructed their engineers to build the siege engines on the site from the materials at hand. If the lord had enough horses, however, the siege engines might be partially assembled before hand and then put together from the partial pieces upon arriving at the battlefield, which would give the defenders less time to prepare. The soldiers who operated the siege engines often became quite fond of their particular devices and bestowed names on them such as “War Wolf” and “All the World” in much the same way that later soldiers would name their planes and rifles. Although rocks were by far the most common ammunition, there are records of inventive besiegers throwing almost anything with their catapults and trebuchets. (No doubt the





long hours of boredom associated with any siege gave a boost to their creativity.) A trebuchet in particular was capable of hurling unusual missiles over a castle wall — dead horses and cattle, for example. In addition to the psychological effect this probably had on the castle’s defenders, there was always the chance that the corpses might spread disease within the walls and bring about a quicker end to the siege. Another especially innovative use for a catapult was to launch the heads of slain enemies into the courtyard, or even their entire bodies. If the attacking lord were unusually sadistic, the prisoners might be loaded into the catapult while still alive and launched screaming into the air; few, if any, would survive impact. Such terror tactics were not the only psychological weapons in use during sieges, either; a common technique was for the attacker to have a priest excommunicate everyone inside the besieged castle in the hope of starting a panic.

### *Castle Defense*

Since medieval armies could not travel very fast, nor in any sort of secrecy, word of their approach would always reach the castle ahead of the soldiers themselves. This gave the lord time to prepare for the siege, which would be used to gather extra food and firewood to supplement the stores, to herd livestock into the courtyard for additional food if necessary (and keep the enemy from slaughtering them to feed his troops), and to get as many of the lord’s people within the castle walls as would fit.

The lord would then begin construction of large wooden structures on top of the castle walls called hoardings. A hoarding was essentially a timber hut built so that the floor hung partway out over the castle wall, with hatches set in the floor. Any besieger who got too close to the wall beneath a hoarding found himself targeted by the men within who would drop boulders or shoot arrows down through the floor hatches. Height was one of the biggest advantages of the castle defenders during a siege; the top of the walls gave an excellent view of the activities in the enemy camp (such as the construction of a siege engine) and was also a good vantage from which to harass the enemy troops with arrows. Dropping things on the attackers from the air was





really the only way that the castle dwellers could take an active part in its defense, since opening up a gate to sally forth and engage the enemy on the ground would be an invitation to disaster. The size of the garrison in a typical baronial castle was only thirty to forty men, while a royal castle might have one or two hundred, at most, and the attacking army usually numbered in the thousands. Despite the inequality in numbers, however, the defensive capabilities of the castle usually gave the advantage to the besieged. During the 1294 rebellion in Wales, for example, thirty-seven men successfully defended Harlech Castle against the entire Welsh army.

The primary means of defense for the castle was the Bowman, who might use either a crossbow or the famous English longbow. The tops of the castle's walls would be made of alternating walls and openings, called merlons and embrasures, respectively, so that the solid sections provided good cover for the bowmen, while the openings allowed them to fire down at the enemy. The towers and the walls of the keep were full of narrow slits, or loops, through which arrows could be fired, the sides of the slits flared outward so that the archer could have maximum protection with the least possibility of the walls interfering with his shot. It was standard practice to keep a bow and arrows in every room in the castle, for use in case of attack.

Most castle lords stocked up on crossbows instead of longbows, because they could be used effectively by almost anyone, while a longbowman was the product of long years of training. Edward's castles, however, tended to be manned almost exclusively by longbowmen, as they could get off five arrow shots in the time it would take a man to load and fire a crossbow a single time. Since Edward could take his pick of the trained soldiery of his kingdom, he did not need to worry about running short of trained archers, and his longbows lent him a significant advantage in his military campaigns.

Castle residents who were not able to fire a bow could still contribute to the defense — anyone over the age of seven or so could drop rocks from a hoarding, for example. Rocks and other things could





be dropped straight off the top of the walls or out of the keep windows as well; the stone at the base of the walls, called the batter, was often built to slope so that anything thrown down onto it would bounce or splatter outward to hit attackers many feet away from the wall. Despite popular legend, neither boiling oil nor hot lead were often used, if they were ever used at all — both were far too expensive. Boiling water was the liquid of choice, though the defenders might also throw excrement or urine down on the besiegers. Other options included hot sand, which worked its way into chain mail, burning the wearer and requiring extensive effort to remove. It could also be used to foul the workings of siege engines. Quicklime was another substance that burned anyone it landed on, and was capable of blinding if gotten in the eyes.

The two most serious threats to the safety of the castle were the miners and the big siege engines, the trebuchet in particular. A castle built on rock was safe from mining, but without that protection the defenders could only try to locate the tunnelers before they finished and sink a counter-mine to stop them. If the miners were careful to hide the outward signs of their tunneling, the only way the castle dwellers could locate them was through the use of primitive vibration detectors — usually pans of water set out on the ground, or small children with sharp hearing sent to wander the basement of the castle and put their ears to floor every now and then.

The siege engines represented several different types of threats. In addition to the straightforward use of these weapons to break down the walls, catapults, balistas, and springals could also be loaded with flaming missiles — arrows or rocks wrapped in oil-soaked rags and set alight — to be fired over the castle wall. Although the stone walls and keep would not burn, most of the other buildings in the castle ward were of wood, sometimes roofed with highly flammable thatch, and there was always a good amount of dry straw or rushes scattered around on the ground. Furthermore, the defensive hoardings were made of timber and therefore susceptible to this sort of attack. Fire and smoke could kill livestock and people and destroy precious stores of food,





firewood, and weapons. And, of course, the hurling of animal and human corpses over the walls presented the threat of disease, which could spread like wildfire among the overcrowded and often underfed besieged castle residents.

The best defense against the siege engines was the presence of a sizable ditch, or better yet, a moat. Once the drawbridge was raised, a wide moat completely prevented the use of battering rams and siege towers against the walls. It could also keep the catapults and trebuchets far enough away that precise aiming became impossible and that the increased distance weakened the impact of their missiles. To deal with the moat, the attackers had to either drain away the water or find some other way to cross. Draining the moat was a major engineering task, so the attackers usually tried to cross the water instead by throwing in timber, brush, rocks, and earth to make a bridge. The defenders on the wall would go to great efforts to prevent this, forcing the bridge-builders to work under the shelter of movable hatches at all times or be killed.

The siege engines could also be attacked directly by several means. Any engine that managed to approach the walls might have sand or water dumped on it, both of which could ruin its workings at least temporarily. Since the engines were made of wood, they were subject to attack by flaming missiles from the castle, as were the hatches which protected the attacking soldiers from arrow fire. Another tactic for use against a siege engine that got too close was for the defenders to throw down weighted ropes with hooks attached, in hopes of being able to grapple the engine and tip it over, which usually ruined it. And sometimes the castle would have siege engines of its own to use against the attacker, although their source of ammunition was likely to be limited. The engines of the attackers were a favorite target for the engines of the defenders, and the dead-animals-and-prisoners tactics could be used equally well by both sides, as could flaming missiles.



## The Medieval Army

An army in the time of Edward I held either three or four classes of soldier, depending on whether the army was a professional fighting force like the one the king maintained or a homegrown group such as a lesser lord might command. The elite fighters of a professional medieval army were the knights, nobles trained from boyhood for combat on horseback. Although fearsome fighters, knights were always few in number and very much designed for attack, not defense; they were therefore not much use inside a castle during a siege. The bulk of the medieval army was composed of the men-at-arms, professional soldiers who might be loyal to the king or lord, or who might be hired mercenaries, loyal to whoever paid them. A large number of support troops were also a necessity: engineers, blacksmiths, carpenters, cooks, drovers and the other miscellaneous personnel needed to keep the army fed and supplied. A smaller or more desperate army might also have militia, peasants drafted for an emergency and usually regarded as cannon fodder.

Only a knight could be guaranteed to have armor for battle, thanks to the high price such equipment carried. His armor would consist of a suit of chain mail, made of hundreds of thousands of close-set steel rings riveted together to make a solid fabric, plus a solid metal helmet, a shield of wood bound with leather and rimmed with steel, and possibly small pieces of steel plate at the shoulders, elbows, or knees. (The all-plate suite of armor would not appear for a century yet.) The mail suit included a hood or coif and attached mittens to protect the hands. Chain mail was very good at stopping a sword cut, but not very good at absorbing the crushing blows of a mace or at stopping fast-moving arrows or crossbow bolts, making a hail of arrows from the top of a castle wall a daunting prospect for even the bravest of knights.

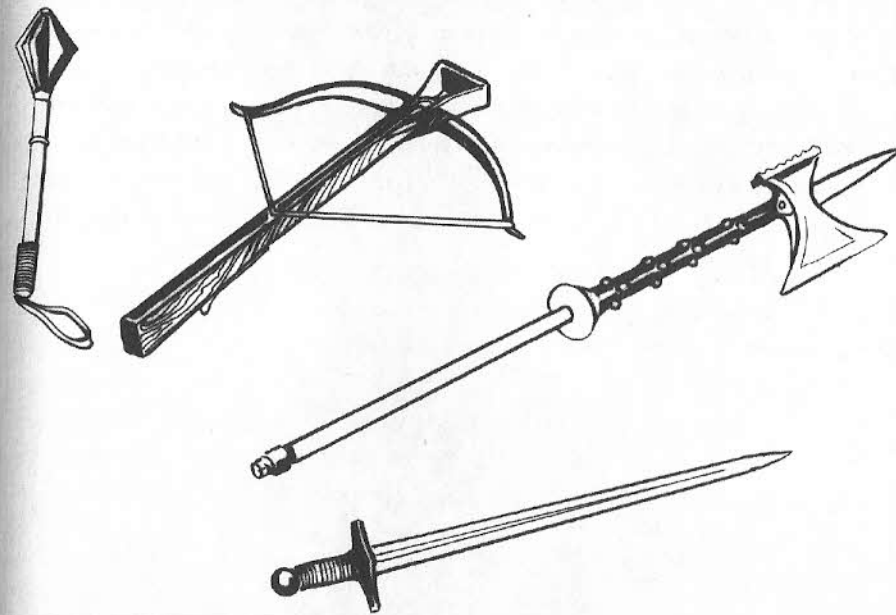
Over the top of his chain mail suit, the knight would wear a tabard, a tunic blazoned with his coat of arms, which originally was little more than a simple and bright-colored symbol that allowed him to be easily identified at a distance. The symbol might be an uncomplicated geometric design of waves or shapes, or it might be a

figure representing the family name, often in a punning or “canting” fashion — for example, a knight of the Arundell family might use swallows, or “hirondelles” in French, as his symbol. The use of heraldic designs began to achieve wider usage during the Crusades, when knights from different countries regularly donned symbols representing their homeland to allow countrymen to recognize them. Later, when the symbols became more individualized, they proved a useful tool for identifying specific knights after a particularly gory battle (serving much the same function as “dog tags” in a modern army.) Eventually each symbol became associated with a particular family, and the coat of arms was handed down from father to son. Embellishments were added as time went on until the designs became so elaborate it took a great deal of training to be able to “read” one and understand what each of the symbols signified.

Knights fought from horseback, with their trained and vicious war-horses taking part in the combat. The most powerful weapon in the knight’s arsenal was the lance, a heavy shaft of wood up to eight feet long, with a sharpened point sometimes sheathed in metal. The lance could only be used from horseback — the knight would “couch” or brace his lance and then send his horse charging at the enemy, which added the horse’s momentum to the force of the attack. An unarmored foe would be run straight through, while an armored one might be knocked off his horse — or else the attacker’s lance might snap, a common occurrence.

A knight unhorsed or relieved of his lance would then begin fighting with his sword. Medieval European swords were simple weapons, straight double-edged blades about three to four feet in length, with a basic cross-shaped hilt. Swords were always swung one-handed — the hand-and-a-half (or “bastard”) sword and the two-handed great sword would not come into use until later. A knight might also have a mace, a short stick made of iron with a large knobbed head on one end, used like a club. The final weapon of the knight was his short dagger, which was almost never used directly in fighting; its main purpose was the delivering of the lethal “mercy blow” to a badly-wounded opponent or comrade.

While the knights were effective and flashy fighters, the bowmen and men-at-arms were the real heart of the medieval army, particularly when a castle came under siege. These fighters were of peasant stock, sons of farmers and townsmen who might leave home to find adventure or fortune, or because of a family argument, or because the family had too many mouths to feed. Such a fighter might have a chain mail hauberk (a long hooded shirt) for armor if he were well-off, or his lord rich and generous, but more commonly wore tough leather armor, called courbouilli, instead. Courbouilli was made by boiling leather in wax, then molding the warm soft leather into the right shape and letting it dry until stiff and hard. A drafted peasant typically had no armor at all; if he were very lucky, he might have a suit of thick quilted cloth to afford him some minor protection.

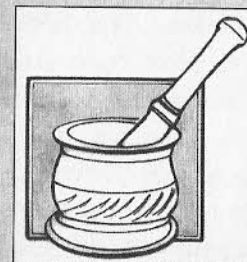


The weapons of choice for men-at-arms were shortswords, axes, spears, or polearms, although any of them could pick up and fire a crossbow when necessary. The shortsword was a scaled-down version of a knight’s longsword, perhaps two or two and a half feet long, and



therefore easier to wield and to afford. Battle axes were modified versions of the common tool hatchet, a single or double-headed blade on a short wooden handle. Sometimes one side of the blade would be shaped into a pick or a hook instead. Spears, one of the most ancient and common weapons, were long wooden-shafted weapons topped with a sharp metal head. The polearm was another long-shafted weapon which came in dozens of varieties, most similar to a very long-handled axe or an elaborate spear. The polearm head might be bladed, spiked, or hooked, and the shaft would often be bound with iron to help prevent breakage.




The weapons of the drafted peasant were the cheapest and simplest available. A peasant might simply go off to war carrying his farming implements as a sort of primitive polearm — scythes, hoes, and picks could all be used as weapons, in a pinch. Some peasants might carry a hammer, or maul. Slings were common as well, and shepherds were often already adept at their use from chasing predators away from their flocks. Sometimes the slings would be mounted on a long pole for extra range and throwing power. As a rule, however, peasant levies were intended more to be living shields for the important fighters farther back in the ranks instead of actual warriors, and their gear tended to reflect that.



## V. Life and Society

The early middle ages, covering the period from 1150 A.D. to around 1300 A.D, were a time of growing prosperity for England and Europe. Technological advances such as the water wheel (used to grind flour) and the great plough enabled more work to be done by fewer laborers so that more land could be farmed, while the stabilization of governmental structures and the increase in international trade led to greater national wealth. All of these developments contributed to the growth in importance of the towns over the farms during the middle ages. At the same time, wars in this period were few, localized, and not very destructive, at least as compared to the era just past and the one that lay just ahead. The combination of more food and fewer deaths in combat led to population increases all over Europe, and the growth in trade between countries disseminated both new goods and new ideas to distant lands.

England's economy was almost entirely agrarian during the middle ages, the country's main source of revenue being its famous wool, usually shipped to clothing mills in Flanders. Every farmer of any size kept a flock of sheep, and the flocks of the larger landholders might contain thousands of the woolly animals. It was commonly said that there were more sheep than men in England during this time period. England also exported a certain amount of grain each year, mostly to the king's lands in Gascony which in turn exported large quantities of wine to England. This two-way trade was of great importance to both territories. England had almost no native industries at the time, aside from a very small domestic cloth industry and the industry of castle and church construction. Barter was still the most common form of commerce among the peasantry, while the nobles used bronze, copper, or silver coins. Gold coins were very rare and generally reserved for only the largest purchases, such as land or a castle.



Most members of the English nobility in the middle ages could read and write at least a little and do simple sums, lord and ladies both. By the standards of the day, however, a man was not considered “literate” unless he was genuinely learned, able to read and speak Greek and Latin, and conversant with the major philosophies, and few nobles had the time or the inclination for that much scholarship. They were therefore not often written of as being literate in the records of the time, although by modern standards they were not truly illiterate the way the peasantry almost all were. In fact, most of them could read and write in more than one language, as an English lord’s household of the middle ages could contain native speakers of three or four different tongues. Among themselves, the nobility spoke a version of French, but with their servants and peasants they used English. Particularly literate nobility, scholars, and clergy might converse in Latin, and in some areas remnants of the older Celtic and Gaelic tongues were still in use.

### ***Social Structure and Status***

In theory, everyone in a feudal society was either royalty, a noble, or a peasant. Medieval reality, of course, was nowhere near that neat. The growth of trade and commerce created a middle class of wealthy merchants and skilled artisans that had no place within the strict feudal order, nor did the common and essential medieval profession of mercenary soldier, and both the noble and peasant classes contained important subdivisions that had a major effect on an individual’s social standing.



At the peasant level, a man could be either a freeman or a serf, a classification that was passed on to his children. A freeman owed taxes, rents, and possibly military service to his lord, could call on the king’s justice in case of a quarrel with that lord, and could move away to a different area if things became too hard for him. A serf, on the other hand, was a semi-slave — he was bound to the lands assigned to him by his lord and could be punished if he tried to leave. But a serf also owed no taxes or money rents (though he owed labor to his lord) and could not be drafted to fight in the lord’s quarrels. Serfs had no access to the king’s court in case of an argument with their lord, but in

legal dealings with other peasants they had the same rights as freemen. Which status was preferable depended on the temperament of the lord and of the individual peasant; under a kind lord, a serf could easily become more prosperous and content than a freeman.

Among the noble class, the chief distinction was between the landed and the unlanded. Under feudal law, the entirety of a noble’s lands and assets passed to his eldest son on his death. Younger sons thus had to depend either on the charity of their elder brothers or on their own skills for their livelihood. Since a noble’s primary duty to the king was to provide military aid, his sons were trained for knighthood from an early age. This made knight-errantry the natural occupation of young noblemen who could not or would not enter into military service in his elder brother’s household. A skilled knight could easily find employment in the house of a nobleman without an heir, or with more trouble than his sons could deal with. A knight who distinguished himself in the service of heirless noble might end up marrying the lord’s daughter and thus gaining lands of his own, which was the ultimate goal of all unlanded nobles. Alternatively, a knight-errant who sought service with the crown might, if he were sufficiently loyal and talented, manage to earn a grant of land from the king himself.

The status of women in the society of the middle ages is a matter of some controversy. In the Saxon shires of England before the time of William the Conqueror, women were considered the equals of men in nearly every area. The arrival of Norman feudalism, with its dependence on military might and its strongly male-dominated flavor of Christianity, brought about a decline in both the social and legal status of females; for example, women could not inherit property, and Norman law expressly permitted a man to beat his wife. The literature of the time often paints a very bleak portrait of the life a proper woman in the middle ages could expect, but it should be remembered that the vast majority of the writers of the time were male clerics with a strong religious bias against women. Less subjective records of the time paint a somewhat different picture of the role of women in feudal society, a role both more active and more positive than what is usually portrayed.





Female children of noble birth had no status at all, and few duties. Unlike their brothers, who were kept busy learning fighting skills, military tactics, and administration, the girls had little to occupy their time aside from embroidery and similar ladylike tasks. When a girl married, however, her level of power changed dramatically. Most noble-born brides were given a portion of their father's land as a wedding gift; although these "dower lands" legally belonged to her husband, their staffing and administration rested with the woman, and in general she kept most of the profits from them as her personal wealth. The wife of a medieval lord was anything but a pampered pet or helpless prisoner of her husband; she was a hardworking and vital member of the household. Her duties did not include the raising of her children, however — that task was left to the nurse, who was expected to see not only to the children's physical needs, but their emotional ones as well. The Lady's tasks included making sure everyone in the castle was fed and clothed, keeping the castle well-stocked and in good repair, and hiring and supervising the castle staff. She also usually acted as her husband's bookkeeper, tracking expenses and seeing that merchants and workmen were paid.

A feudal lord's wife could come to significant power in another way as well. It was usually the case that a girl was married off as early as age fourteen, generally to a man thirty or more years her elder. While this custom was hardly conducive to romance, it was not without its advantages for the bride; she could usually expect to be a widow within a decade or less, at which time she gained control of her husband's lands and wealth until her eldest son reached legal maturity. At that point she was free to make another match, if she wished, with someone perhaps more to her liking than her first husband. Widowhood could bring considerable political power; if a lord died before his heir was of legal age, his wife became her son's regent and could legally represent her husband and his lands in the king's court. The histories of the period have many examples of noble wives acting in the place of their husbands and exerting considerable political influence.



## *A Medieval Lord's Household*

The proper maintenance and defense of a baron's castle and lands required the continuous efforts of hundreds of people, many of them highly skilled in their tasks. The lord's staff could be divided into two rough groups: members of the household, and members of the garrison.

All the professional fighting men of the lord's retinue were part of the castle's garrison. The permanent size of this force was not large — a few knights, perhaps twenty bowmen, and one or two hundred men-at-arms, at most. Only the greatest lords would have a garrison this large; most were substantially smaller. If the lord planned to go to war against a neighbor, came under attack himself, or was called upon to provide men for a major national campaign, the ranks of the garrison would be increased by drafting peasants or hiring mercenary soldiers. The knights were the most fearsome warriors of the garrison, although they were far more useful for attack than defense. These were generally the lord's sons (if they were old enough), or knights-errant hired by the lord, all trained as fighters from early boyhood. While the knights were effective and flashy fighters, the bowmen and men-at-arms were the real heart of the garrison, particularly when the castle came under siege. These fighters were of peasant stock, sons of farmers and townsmen who might leave home to find adventure or fortune, or because of a family argument, or because the family had too many mouths to feed.

The staff for the castle itself and its environs was about the same size as that for the garrison, but considerably more diversified. Like the men-at-arms, the castle servants came from peasant stock. A skilled and trusted servant had greater prestige than a simple farmer, though, so castle positions were often passed along within the same family, many generations holding the same post. The workers were divided into seven "departments," each headed by a specific office held by an experienced and skilled servant. The seneschal was responsible for the great hall; the chamberlain for the chambers (living quarters); the usher for the controlling the doors and deciding who was to be admitted to the castle; the cook for the kitchen; the marshal for the

security of the lord's lands and livestock; and the butler for the "buttery," the room where ale and wine were stored. (The buttery had nothing to do with dairy products; the word was a corruption of the French word *bouteillerie*, literally, "bottle-place".)

These positions and the tasks that went with them were subject to addition and modification by each individual lord to suit his specific needs, however, and there were a number of other posts commonly held in a large household. There might be a treasurer, to keep track of the lord's coins and valuables, a chancellor to do the lord's writing and keep and interpret the law books, and a constable to keep order within the castle grounds. A common catch-all post, especially in the smaller households, was that of steward, who was a general all-purpose castle manager. Sometimes the post might be divided between the estates steward who looked after the lands and the household steward who looked after the castle. Because the position could involve so many responsibilities, opportunities often arose for the steward to profit at his lord's expense, and so many did so that the crooked steward was a common stereotype of the day. An honest and trustworthy steward was a treasured prize, and a lord might go to great lengths to keep such a man in his employ if he found one. The definitions of the duties of each of the high-level servants were loose and often overlapped, especially in the smaller households.

The household complement of the castle always contained a certain number of people of noble birth in addition to all the commoners. These individuals also had their tasks within the castle, although they were not, of course,

considered servants. Often these were the children of nearby lords who were sent away from home in order to learn the duties and responsibilities of their class. The youngest boys would serve as pages, whose duties were primarily running errands for the lord and lady. Teenage boys who expected to become knights would serve as squires, assisting the household knights and receiving training in the skills and duties of knighthood in exchange. A boy with a more scholastic bent might instead study with the castle's priest to prepare to enter a seminary. Girls were not generally fostered out away from home until they were in their early teens; at that point, if no good marriage had yet been arranged for them, they might travel to another noble's household to serve the lord's wife as a lady-in-waiting, thereby learning from the lady of the house and also perhaps having the opportunity to meet suitable husbandly prospects who might take an interest in them.







## *Farming in the Middle Ages*

During the early years of the Saxon rule of England, in about the 5th century A.D., farming was a simple matter: each Saxon clan would stake out a patch of ground, grow their crops and graze their livestock until the land was exhausted, and then move on to fresh territory. As the population increased and society started to shift to more permanent settlements, however, this method became impractical — newer, better, farming techniques had to be developed.

The first advance came when early farmers noticed that a field left unsown for a time would produce better crops when resown than a field which was continuously farmed. This led to the Saxon two-field system, where each farmer would tend two fields which would be sown on alternate years, the unused field being left fallow to recover fertility. By the time of the Normans, the system had advanced further to the three-field system, where it remained for the duration of the Middle ages. In this farming method, each farmer's croplands were divided into three parts. In the first rotation, the field would be sown with wheat (or rye, in sandy soil), crops that leach nutrients from the soil. The following year, the field would be sown with oats or barley, which are less demanding crops, or with peas or beans, which benefit the soil by fixing nitrogen (medieval man was quite capable of noticing the effect these crops had on his land, even if he didn't know the reason for it.) In the third year, the field would be left fallow, with no crops planted. The three-field farming method kept the soil in good enough shape that it remained the main farming method in England for hundreds of years without significant change.

The farmer's year began in September, when the fields were turned under and ploughed to prepare for the late autumn planting. Ploughs were usually drawn by teams of from two to eight oxen (castrated male cattle). A relatively wealthy peasant might own a plowhorse, but horses required better feed and were more expensive to care for in general than hardy oxen, and so were rare. Oxen had the additional advantage that they could be slaughtered for meat when they were no longer needed for the fields. When the ploughing was

finished, by late October or early November, the autumn crop of wheat or rye would be sown, scattered by hand in the furrows made by the plough. Next came the harrowing, during which the oxen would draw a grid of wooden beams across the fields to cover up the seed. After this work was done, almost all of the oxen would be slaughtered and their meat salted for the winter months. While medieval man knew how to make hay (good grass-producing meadows were much prized), he could produce only enough of it to keep a few animals alive through the winter, and it was more profitable to keep the female milk-producing cows than the oxen.

During the winter months from late November to February the farmer's work load was relatively light. In December he would thresh the grain harvested the previous fall, and in January his cows would calve, and he would repair his hedges and ditches. Hardy peas and beans could also be sown at this time, if the ground had not frozen. March brought the start of the spring ploughing season, when the second rotation fields were prepared and planted with oats or barley. Next to wheat, barley was the most important grain produced in medieval England — it was used to make the ale that both serfs and lords drank in great quantities. March also brought the start of the spring lambing season for the shepherds. April was the time when the less common crops of hemp (for rope) or flax (for linen) were sown. In May the fallow fields would be turned under, and June was the season for weeding the crops and shearing the sheep. Early July was the time to mow hay from the grass meadows, and the end of July began the harvest season, the busiest time of the year for the farmer. Throughout late July and August the peasants would labor almost non-stop to cut and stack their own crops and those of their lord before the fall rains came. At the end of the harvest season would be a brief holiday for a few days, with feasting and dancing, before the year's cycle began again.

## Afterword

Despite his failure to take and hold the lands of Scotland, Edward's defeat of Wales and his rule of England as a whole remain excellent examples of the level of efficiency Norman feudalism could achieve. As a monarch, Edward never lost sight of the importance of tending to the administration of his kingdom at the same time as he pursued his goals of conquest, using his castles as military and administrative centers of his authority. The ruins of his royal castles still stand nearly seven hundred years after Edward himself passed on, an enduring monument to his reign.

As examples of the medieval art of castle-building, Edward's fortresses would never be surpassed, because their time was almost at an end. The first artillery pieces started to appear on the battlefields of Europe within a few decades of Edward's death. Within fifty years, they would become common, and their advent spelled the end of the castle as an effective defense. Stone walls were no match for the power of gunpowder and iron cannonballs. As the era of modern warfare got underway, the castle became little more than a status symbol for the aristocracy, evolving from military forts into the ostentatious palaces of the later Middle Ages. In Edward's time, though, no one knew that the day of the castle's supremacy was nearly over. The king's stone fortresses, still impressive to modern man, must have been awe-inspiring to the common folk of Edward's time — a very obvious and striking symbol of the authority of the king. To the peasantry who lived within sight of its walls, the castle was simply power made visible.

## British Rulers of the Early Middle Ages

### *The Kings of England and the Years of Their Reign*

William I (the Conqueror)	1066-1087
William II (Rufus)	1087-1100
Henry I (Beauclerc)	1100-1135
Stephen of Blois	1135-1154
Henry II (Plantagenet)	1154-1189
Richard I (Lionheart)	1189-1199
John (Lackland)	1199-1216
Henry III	1216-1272
Edward I (Longshanks)	1272-1307

### *The Kings of Scotland and the Years of Their Reign*

Malcolm III	1058-1093
Donald Bane	1093-1097
Edgar	1097-1107
Alexander I	1107-1124
David I	1124-1153
Malcolm IV	1153-1165
William the Lion	1165-1214
Alexander II	1214-1249
Alexander III	1249-1286
Margaret, Maid of Norway	1286-1290
Succession Dispute - <i>Scotland effectively ruled by Edward I</i>	1290-1292
John Balliol	1292-1296
Interregnum	1296-1306
Robert I, the Bruce	1306-1329



### The Welsh Sovereign Princes

Bleddyn ap Cynfyn	1063-1075
Trahaern ap Caradog	1075-1081
Gruffydd ap Cynan ab Iago	1081-1137
Owain Gwynedd	1137-1170
Dafydd ab Owain Gwynedd	1170-1194
Llywelyn Fawr, the Great	1194-1240
Dafydd ap Llywelyn	1240-1246
Llywelyn ap Gruffydd ap Llywelyn	1246-1282

### Ranks of English Nobility

Greatest to least

	Male	Female
<i>Titled Ranks:</i>	King	Queen
	Prince	Princess
	Duke	Duchess
	Marquess	Marchioness
	Earl	Countess
	Viscount	Viscountess
	Baron	Baroness
<i>Untitled Ranks:</i>	Baronet	
	Knight	

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